























"HERE'S TO ADELE WHO IS FOURTEEN TO-DAY." — Page 51.



# ADELE DORING ON A RANCH

By

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Club of California*

Illustrated by

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Adele Doring on a Ranch

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*Dedicated to*  
*Mary and Franklin Moore*  
*the desert children*  
*with whom I spent six happy months*  
*on the Bar M ranch in Arizona*







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# ADELE DORING ON A RANCH

## CHAPTER ONE

### ADELE'S FOURTEENTH BIRTHDAY

“The fifth of May  
It is to-day,  
And long ago on a lovely morn  
A little baby girl was born  
To be merry and cheery and gay.”

ADELE DORING sang happily as she pirouetted on light toes about the sunny sewing-room, and then, quite out of breath, she sank down on a low stool.

“Adorable Mumsie,” she exclaimed as she nestled her head close to her mother, “you just can’t guess how grateful I am for being your little girl. Wouldn’t it have been dreadful if I had been given to some one else fourteen years ago? I wouldn’t have had



you or Giant Daddy to love me, or Brother Jack to tease, or Kate to make me birthday cakes."

Then, springing up and cuddling down in her mother's lap little-girl fashion, she murmured, "Mumsie, do you know if I had had the choice of all the mothers in the world, I would have chosen you."

Mrs. Doring rested her cheek on the gold-brown head as she replied tenderly, "And do you know, Della, if Giant Daddy and I had been told to pick out a little girl for our very own, you are the one we would have selected?"

Adele laughed happily as she replied: "We're what Brother Jack calls a mutual admiration society, aren't we, Mumsie? But somehow on birthdays I can't help thinking how grateful and glad I am that I have such a nice home and such adorable parents." Then, as another thought flashed into her mind, she sat up, and, looking at her mother with shining eyes, exclaimed: "Oh, Mrs. Doring, you just ought to see the



great, big, beautiful cake that Kate is making for me this very minute. It is covered with deep white frosting, and has 'Happy Birthday' written on it in pink letters, and the table is set out under the apple-trees that are all in bloom. Ho! Here come the girls now, so I must skip down and meet them."

Giving her mother an impulsive hug, the lassie danced away, turning to throw a kiss from the open door.

Mrs. Doring smiled happily as she resumed her sewing. How she dreaded the coming of that birthday which would change her daughter into a young lady, but at fourteen she was still a care-free, tender-hearted, loving little girl.

A moment later Adele skipped out on the lawn with arms outstretched to greet the six maidens who, dressed in their prettiest summer muslins, were hurrying toward her.

"Happy birthday to the president of the Sunnyside Club!" they chorused gayly.



"And may she live forever and ever," Betty Burd sang out. "Girls, shall we give Della fourteen spans or fourteen hugs?"

"Not hugs, please," implored Adele, "for Kate said that it took her just ages to iron all these ruffles on my new birthday dress, and she would surely be heartbroken if they were crushed so soon."

"I'll tell you what," the practical Bertha Angel suggested: "let's postpone the usual birthday demonstration until to-morrow, and then, when Adele has on her gingham school-dress, we will catch her unawares and hug her or spank her as we prefer."

"Agreed!" laughed Rosamond Wright. "But I know well enough that we shall all hug her."

Adele led them to a spot under a spreading maple-tree, the leaves of which were silvery green. There they found cushions arranged in a circle upon the grass.

"Girls," their president was saying, "we decided to have a meeting of our club, first



of all, to-day, and tell Doris some of the things that have happened while she and her mother have been away in the South."

"Oh, good!" Doris Drexel exclaimed as she sank down on a soft red pillow. "I had a wonderful time in Florida, of course, and I saw so many interesting things, but you just can't guess how lonely I have been for all of you girls. I hope that I shall never have to spend another winter away from you."

"We missed you, too, Doris," Adele replied. Then, when they were seated, she said, "It's just a year ago to-day that our Sunnyside Club gave a surprise party for Eva Dearman, the little orphan girl whom we found so sad and lonely at the Home."

"You found, you mean, Della," Gertrude Willis corrected. "We did not find Eva, but, of course, we were all glad to help give the surprise party for the orphans, and how happy they were! We who have had parties ever since we were tiny could hardly realize



what a great pleasure it was to those homeless children whose lives are so barren."

"Eva Dearman was different from the others," Adele said. "She had been brought up in a nice home, but her father lost his money, and then, when she was left an orphan and people thought that she hadn't a relative in all the world, she was sent to the orphanage."

"It was so hard for her just at first," Gertrude mused reminiscently, "but how brave and sunny she was, and so kind and sisterly to the other orphans, especially to that poor, forlorn Amanda Brown, whom every one seemed to dislike."

"And wasn't it just like a story-book, the way it all ended!" Rosamond Wright, the romantic, exclaimed. "Eva had been sent to live with those terrible Greens, who had recently made a lot of money and thought that they ought to snub every one who wasn't as rich as they were. They made life miserable for poor Eva, and then, just when everything was blackest, such a nice



uncle, whom she had supposed was dead, turned up and carried her West with him. And they took Amanda Brown, too, because she was so heartbroken when she thought that Eva was leaving her."

"We all went down to the train to see them off," Doris Drexel continued, "and then, you remember, the very next day Mother and I left for Florida, and so I never knew how Eva liked her ranch home. I suppose that she wrote you about it, didn't she, Della? I know that she loved you as dearly as if she had been your own sister."

"Yes, indeed, I have heard from Eva almost every week," Adele replied brightly, "but I'm not going to try to tell you about it, Doris, for I want you to hear Eva's letters. Wait! I'll skip into the house and get them."

A moment later Adele returned with a pack of letters tied with a blue ribbon.

"I know that the other girls won't mind hearing them again," she said, "as she



dropped down on her cushion, "for they are just as interesting as chapters in a story-book."

Then Adele opened the first letter and read it aloud.



## CHAPTER TWO

### A LETTER FROM EVA

“DEAR ADELE AND THE SUNNY SIX:

“Here we are at last in Arizona, and, although we have only been here two days, we have had such an interesting experience; but, before I tell you about it, I want to describe the desert.

“I remember that Betty Burd once said that she always skipped descriptions in a story, but don't let her skip this, for, unless she knows what the place looks like, she won't be able to understand the adventure.

“Now I must begin at the beginning!

“We were four days on the train, and then, one morning just at sunrise, we arrived at Silver Creek station. Della, I shall never forget that first moment when I stood and gazed at the desert. The sun, like a ball of fire, was rising above a range of mountains in the east, and all about us, as far as we could see toward the north and west, was a flat waste of shining white sand on which grew scraggly bushes called mesquite, while here and there was a tall thorny cactus.



“Uncle Dick, excusing himself, had hastened to the baggage car and was assisting a lad, dressed in cowboy attire, to lift a big trunk down to the platform. Then the train puffed away and soon disappeared behind hills of sand, leaving us alone on that wide, silent desert.

“We turned to look for the town, but there was none. One small building stood near the track, and Mandy and I were surprised to see that people really lived there. A middle-aged man in overalls had taken a mail-bag from the train, and a thin, lank boy of about fourteen sauntered out on the platform to see what was happening. They were Mr. Wells, the station-master, and Danny, his son; and the house, as we learned later, was their home, general store, and post-office combined.

“While we were watching them Uncle Dick came back with the good-looking young cowboy who had helped him with the trunk, and whom he introduced as Rusty Pete. The young man acted shy. I don’t believe that he is used to girls; in fact, Uncle Dick says that there is only one girl of about our age for miles and miles around, and she is away at boarding school. My, but I’m glad that I brought Amanda. Much as I love my daddy-uncle, I surely would have been lonesome without a girl to whom I could chatter.”



"Well, I should think so," Betty Burd interrupted. "Girls, can you imagine how dreadful it would be if one of us was away off on a desert without the other six?"

"It surely is not pleasant to contemplate," Doris said with a shiver. "But, Della, do go on; I am ever so eager to hear about Eva's new home."

And so Adele continued reading.

"After we had spoken a moment with the cowboy, he turned to Uncle Dick and said, 'The iron pony is just around the station, Mr. Dearman,' and we all walked in that direction.

" 'An iron pony!' Mandy whispered to me. 'What ever do you suppose that is, Eva?'

" 'I'll guess it's an automobile,' I had just said, and then we saw it. Girls, what do you think it was? A great big beautiful touring-car, every bit as luxurious as the one the Greens had!

" 'Oh, Uncle Dick,' I cried, 'I never dreamed that there were automobiles on the desert. Does this one belong to you?'

" 'It belongs to all three of us,' he laughingly replied. 'You and Mandy may each own a share in it.'



"Uncle Dick is just wonderful! He seems to be delighted to have two girls to look after; but, oh, Della, I never, *never* will be able to do enough to properly express my gratitude, and Mandy feels the same. He says that all he wants us to do is to be happy, and of course we are that,—radiantly, jubilantly happy!

"Well, Mandy and I climbed up on the comfortable back seat and soon we were rolling along over a hard, white road. I was surprised to see bright-colored flowers blossoming here and there in the sand, and, too, there were occasional clumps of wiry green grass. For about three miles the road followed along the steep, high banks of a dry river, which Uncle Dick told us was Silver Creek. We laughed and said that it was a funny kind of creek, without any water in it, and Uncle Dick replied, 'Just wait until the rainy season comes. You will behold the liveliest stream that you ever saw, for then the water rushes down from the mountains in a raging torrent.'

"Soon the road began to climb a mesa. I remembered enough of my geography to know the name of the flat table-land the moment I saw it. 'Now keep watching,' Uncle Dick called over his shoulder, 'and in another second you will behold the turrets of your future home.'

"Mandy and I peered eagerly ahead, and



when we reached the other edge of the mesa we saw, on the desert below, a big adobe house, and, to my surprise, there were willow trees growing near by.

“‘Why, Uncle Dick,’ I cried, ‘what can it mean? Such a garden place right in the desert!’

“‘It’s an oasis,’ Uncle Dick told us; ‘otherwise known in these parts as a water-hole. If it wasn’t for these water-holes, cattle would often die of thirst. When they are out on the range, they sometimes travel miles to find one.’

“Now comes the biggest surprise of all, for, of course, I expected that Mandy and I were to keep house for Uncle Dick and his cowboys. But what do you think? He has a middle-aged Mexican woman, whom he calls Señora Gabriella, for a housekeeper, and her beautiful, black-eyed daughter, Bonita, who is sixteen years old, helps her. I liked them both right away, and so did Mandy. They live in a small adobe house down near Silver Creek. Señora’s husband, Miguel, is one of Uncle’s range-riders and is seldom at home.

“Oh, Della, I can hardly wait to have you see this wonderful ranch house. It is surrounded by a wide veranda, and all of the rooms open out on it. I just had to squeal for joy when I saw the living-room. It is so exactly as I had hoped that it would be.



It extends across the front of the house and has a wide fireplace at one side, and when we came, a mesquite root was burning in it, for these October days are pretty cold, but, oh, it's such a crispy, glorious cold! It makes one feel like racing and shouting just for the joy of it.

"Overhead there are heavy rafters. Then there's a long center table with magazines and papers scattered over it, and there are easy-chairs just built for cosy comfort. An Edison talking-machine stands in one corner, with lots of records, and there are cases full of books, for Uncle Dick is a great reader; and, oh, yes, on the wall is a bear skin. Think of it, Della! Uncle Dick shot that bear one day when he was riding in the mountains, but that was ten years ago. He says that he has not seen one since. I tell you this for fear you may say that you do not care to visit me if you are likely to be eaten by a bear.

"Señorita Bonita beckoned while we stood gazing about us, and, opening a door, she led us into a sunny bedroom, which looked right out on the oasis. I'm not going to call it a water-hole, because that isn't a pretty enough name for it. 'This is your room, Señorita Eva,' she said, 'and here is the other.' Then, turning, she left us. How glad I am that the housekeeper and her daughter can speak English, even though it



*does* sound a little queer, for Mandy and I do not know a single word of any language but our own. Bonita has the sweetest voice, soft and purring.

“Well, when we were alone, Mandy and I put down our bags and just flew into each other’s arms, laughing and crying together, for, Della, when you have been two orphans without any of your own folks to love you, and then suddenly find that you have such a kind, good daddy-uncle, and such a nice home, and everything just as other girls have, it surely is hard not to cry, even if the tears are those of joy.

“But suddenly there came a rapping on our door and Uncle Dick sang out, ‘Ding dong! First call to dinner!’

“O dear! here comes Rusty Pete for the mail. He is going to Douglas to-day, and we have to send our letters in whenever we get a chance; but I’ll begin another one to you right away, for I haven’t even started to tell you about the exciting adventure that we had.

“Good-by for now, darling Della. Give my love to the Sunny Six and write soon to your very happy, though *always* lonely for you,

“FRIEND EVA.”



## CHAPTER THREE

### SURPRISING THINGS HAPPEN

"Oh, Della, don't stop!" Doris exclaimed. "Do read the next letter. I am ever so interested, and I want to know what exciting thing happened to Eva."

"Yes, do read it," Betty Burd chimed in. "Won't Doris be surprised when she finds out what happened!"

"Don't you tell her, Betty," Rosamond warned. "Let Della read the letter."

"I'll read it if I can find it," Adele said as she looked through her pack. Then she exclaimed, "Here it is; and oh, Doris, you surely will be as delighted as we were when you hear what it is all about."

Then, having greatly aroused the curiosity of that maiden, she proceeded to read Eva's second letter:



*"Silver Creek, Arizona.*

"DEAR DELLA AND THE SUNNY SIX :

"I said I would begin another letter right away, from where I left off last night. Well, when Uncle Dick called us to dinner, Mandy and I bustled about, getting ready. We brushed the dust as best we could from our traveling dresses, and then we went into the living-room.

" 'Whoever is hungry as a bear,  
Follow me out to my lair,'

Uncle Dick chanted as he dropped the paper he had been reading and led us to the veranda near the oasis. There was a table set with six places. 'This is our pleasant-weather dining-room,' Uncle Dick told us. 'It adjoins the kitchen, and so it is easy for Bonita to serve us. In stormy weather we eat in the living-room.'

" 'Then I hope that it will always be pleasant,' I declared, 'for this corner of the veranda makes the nicest dining-room.'

" 'Who are the other places set for?' Mandy asked, and Uncle Dick told us that one belonged to Rusty Pete, who had gone back to Silver Creek on an errand. 'And the other two are for any passer-by who stops at the ranch near meal-time.'

"Think of that for hospitality, Della! It is the custom of the desert for a cowboy out on the range to stay all night at what-



ever ranch may be nearest, and Uncle Dick says that no one asks him who he is, where he has come from, or where he is going, unless he volunteers the information.

"When we were seated, Mandy and I on either side of Uncle Dick, who sat at one end of the long, narrow table, Señora Gabriella brought on the dinner, and, oh, Della, guess what we had! Something just ever so nice! I don't believe that you can guess, so I will have to tell you. We had the most delicious fried quail and other good things besides. Mandy and I were just ravenously hungry, and we ate so much I laughingly told Uncle Dick that before long he might be sorry that he had adopted us.

"I just know that you girls are wondering what the exciting adventure was, about which I said that I would tell you. Well, this was the beginning of it:

"As we were leaving the table we saw our automobile coming over the mesa. Rusty was driving, and Uncle Dick exclaimed, 'Eva, here comes your trunk.'

"'But, Uncle Dick, I didn't have a trunk,' I said. 'It must belong to somebody else. I remember that there was a big trunk taken off the train at the station, but truly it was not mine.'

"'Oh, ho! Is that so?' Uncle Dick replied, with a twinkle in his eyes. 'Well, let's take a look at it, anyway.'



"Rusty, having driven the car close to the veranda, shouldered the trunk and carried it into my room, Uncle Dick helping. Amanda and I followed, truly puzzled. When the big trunk was on the floor Uncle Dick exclaimed, 'There, now, Mistress Eva; read the label, and if the trunk is not for you, then Rusty will take it back to the station.'

"The cowboy grinned with delight. I stooped and read, 'For Eva Dearman, Silver Creek, Arizona.'

"'Surely that is my name,' I said. 'You bought me a trunk, didn't you, Uncle Dick? But what shall I put in it? I have almost no clothes at all, and neither has Amanda.'

"'Maybe there is something in the trunk now,' Uncle Dick suggested. 'Here is the key. Suppose you look in and find out.'

"I was so excited I could hardly turn the key, but when at last that trunk was open, what do you suppose? We found that it was packed full of clothes—two sets of everything that we could need, one for Amanda and one for me. There were soft cashmere house dresses and warm tailor-made suits with hats to go with them, and gingham morning dresses, and, best of all, there were two complete cowgirl costumes in pretty brown khaki, even to the leggings and broad-brimmed hats and red handkerchiefs to tie around our necks.

"'Oh, Uncle Dick,' I cried, and I just



couldn't say another word, but threw my arms about him and hugged him hard.

" 'There, there!' he said, when Amanda tried to thank him. 'You two are my nieces and the only relatives I have, and it is a pleasure for me to give you things. Now, Rusty and I will leave you alone. Suppose you rig up in the cowgirl suits, and then I will show you something else.'

"While we were dressing Amanda exclaimed: 'Eva, I know when your uncle bought these things. You remember he told us to wait in the Chicago station while he did an errand uptown. Well, he was gone two long hours, and filling this trunk for us, I do believe, was his errand.'

"Oh, Adele, isn't he the kindest and best Uncle Dick that you ever heard of?

"When Amanda and I had on the suits, from the leggins to the broad-brimmed hat, not forgetting the loosely-knotted red handkerchiefs, we skipped out to the living-room and gazed at ourselves in the long mirror, and Amanda cried: 'Eva, you make such a pretty cowgirl!' And I replied: 'You surely do, Mandy. That red handkerchief is so becoming to you, with your black hair and eyes.'

"Della, you never would know that Amanda was the same girl who used to be called so homely and cross-looking in the orphanage. She is always smiling; the



frowns have disappeared with her unhappy past, and her hair, now that it is cared for, curls about her face in the prettiest ringlets.

“When we had admired ourselves front and back and from top to toe, we heard Uncle Dick calling, ‘Ready, girls?’ and we skipped out on the veranda, wondering what was going to happen next. Can you guess what we saw out there waiting for us? Well, turn over the page and you shall know.”



## CHAPTER FOUR

ENTER, DONALD DARE!

"Is the next going to be the exciting part?" Doris Drexel asked eagerly, when Adele paused for breath.

"Oh, it keeps getting more and more exciting way to the end of the letter," Peggy Pierce told her. "Just wait till you hear."

"Let me see, what did I say last?" Adele questioned, turning back a sheet. "Oh, yes:"

"Mandy and I, dressed in our new cow-girl suits, skipped out to the veranda when Uncle Dick called, and what do you suppose we saw out there waiting for us? Something I have wanted to own for ever so long but never dreamed that I would. Yes! Ponies! Not plump, roly-poly ones like Firefly and Star, but alert, wiry-looking creatures.

"'Oh, Uncle Dick,' I cried in delight, 'are we to ride them?'"

"'You are, indeed,' Uncle Dick laughingly replied. 'That is, you are to try to



ride them. You know that cow ponies sometimes refuse to carry ladies, but you can't tell what these particular ponies will do until you mount them. Isn't that so, Rusty?'

"The cowboy grinned, but seeing how truly frightened Amanda and I were, Uncle Dick stopped teasing and said, 'These ponies are well broken, Eva, and are guaranteed not to throw a rider or to buck. Now let's see what sort of horsewomen you are.'

"Adele, I was so frightened when I found myself alone on the back of that brown pony that my heart went like a trip-hammer; but I thought of you and how you gallop so fearlessly on Firefly, and I said to myself, 'What Adele can do, I at least can try to do,' and so I held on as best I could and away we went at a gentle pace. Uncle Dick rode at my side and Rusty stayed close to Amanda. After a time, when I found that Rocket, as Uncle Dick called my pony, had no intention of throwing me, I began to rest more comfortably in the saddle, and, as the

as we neared this  
Dick said: I have an errand at Hog Canyon. I want to see if Donald Dare will help at the round-up.'

"'Oh, Uncle Dick,' I exclaimed, 'why is this beautiful spot called Hog Canyon?'



“ ‘Because a few years ago it was overrun with small wild hogs. Few of them are left, however. Oho! Look yonder and you will see the object of my search breaking a young broncho.’

“ We had rounded a rocky point, and beheld, just in front of us, a hatless youth who was doing his best to stay on the back of a small horse that was rearing and plunging. We drew rein and watched.

“ ‘Uncle Dick,’ I cried in alarm, ‘surely that boy will be dashed on the rocks.’

“ Uncle Dick’s face was grave, for the pony seemed determined to hurl its rider on the jagged boulders. Adele, I wish you might have seen the face of that boy. He was not angry, as some might have been, but he was determined to conquer.

“ ‘Donald Dare,’ Uncle shouted, ‘get that broncho away from the rocks if you can!’

“ The boy did not look up, but we knew that he had heard, for suddenly the pony wheeled, and, like mad, it raced across the level desert.

“ ‘That’s better,’ Uncle Dick said in a tone of relief. ‘The boy will let it run now until it is tired, and then he will have mastered it for to-day; to-morrow its spirit will be somewhat broken, and soon it will be as fine a saddle pony as Rocket there. Eva, I suppose you would hardly think it possible now, but the pony that you are riding



was the wildest one that Rusty ever broke, and it threw him three times. I tell you it takes a pretty smart beast to do that; hey, Rusty?’

“‘Oh, Uncle Dick,’ I exclaimed, ‘do ponies ever go wild again after they have been broken?’ I knew that I could never stick on Rocket’s back if he started to plunge and rear.

“‘No,’ Uncle Dick replied. ‘Rocket has forgotten that he ever was a wild pony except when he meets a coyote, and that is almost never, for coyotes are not particularly anxious to be met in the daytime. Ha! Here the triumphant hero comes.’

“We turned to see a foam-covered pony and a weary-looking but exultant rider rounding a point of rocks.

“‘Well done, Donald Dare!’ Uncle Dick called, as the boy rode up to us. ‘The worst of your task is over now, and you are going to have a fine little horse there. Donald,’ he added, ‘you knew that I left suddenly for the East to bring back a niece. Well, this is Eva, and the other little lady is her good friend, Amanda Brown.’

“Donald snatched off his sombrero as he exclaimed brightly, ‘I am ever so glad to meet Mr. Dearman’s niece and her friend, and Mother will be so pleased to have you call upon her, for she, too, lived somewhere in the East when she was younger.’



“ ‘We are all coming over some day soon,’ Uncle Dick replied, ‘but as yet the girls are not used to riding and I think that we have been far enough for a first lesson.’ Then he asked kindly, ‘How is your mother, Donald?’

“The boy’s face saddened as he replied: ‘Mother is not at all well, I am quite sure, Mr. Dearman, but she thinks that I need her to take care of me and so she keeps up. She smiles in that brave way of hers whenever I look at her, but this morning, when she thought that I was reading, I saw an expression on her face that showed me how she was suffering. I begged her to let me get some woman in Douglas to come and take care of her, but she will not.’

“Amanda and I were much interested in the cowboy, who seemed to be such a fine lad, and that evening, when we were seated near the fireplace, in which a mesquite root was burning, I said, ‘Uncle Dick, won’t you tell us something about the cowboy whom we saw this afternoon?’

“ ‘Willingly,’ Uncle replied. ‘But there is little that I can tell, for Donald Dare seldom speaks of his past. It was just a year ago that the boy and his mother came from, I know not where, and started housekeeping in a little adobe hut up in Hog Canyon. A man from the East had built the place, intending to live there and prove up on the



land, but after a few months he returned to his native state, and so Donald Dare and his mother took undisputed possession. The lad works about on the neighboring ranches, and has a small herd of his own. He and his mother seem to be very poor, but they are so proud that one cannot inquire. The mother, who must have been a pretty girl, is a nice-mannered, brave little woman. The life on such an isolated ranch is lonely for her, but she is cheerful and uncomplaining. Donald is devoted to her, and now that he fears that she is ill, I know how it must grieve him.'

" 'What about his father?' I asked. 'Where is he?'

" 'Donald never spoke of his father but once,' Uncle Dick replied. 'He was feeling so badly to think that he could not give his mother every comfort, and he exclaimed impulsively, "You see, Mr. Dearman, it isn't as though Mother was used to hardship, for she isn't. She had every comfort in her eastern home when she was young, and then, perhaps unwisely, she ran away with my father and he soon squandered her money. Though she often wrote back to her sister, to tell where she was, she never received an answer, and now Mother believes that my father destroyed the letters and did not mail them."

" 'The boy felt very bitterly because of



this,' Uncle Dick told us. 'He spoke as though his father had died.'

"'Poor boy,' I said. 'Donald Dare is certainly a splendid son, isn't he, Uncle Dick?'

"'Yes, he is a fine lad,' Uncle replied gravely; 'the sort of boy I would wish for a son. But his real name isn't Dare, Eva; that is a nickname the cowboys have given him because he is so daring, just as they call Pete "Rusty." Donald's real name is Burnley.'

"Now, Adele, the moment Uncle Dick said that name, I was *almost sure* that I had heard it before, and it seems to me that I heard it in Sunnyside. Did you ever tell me anything about a Donald Burnley?

"Do write soon to your lovingest

"EVA."



## CHAPTER FIVE

### A JOYOUS REUNION

WHEN Adele finished reading the letter, the girls were all sitting up and eagerly watching Doris, as though they could hardly keep from telling her something.

“Donald Burnley!” that maiden repeated. “Was Eva right? Was that a name you had ever heard in Sunnyside?”

“I thought not, at first,” Adele replied. “And then, all of a sudden, it came to me just like an inspiration, and I ran into the house and cried, ‘Mumsie, what was the name of the man, the one papa called an adventurer, who came to Sunnyside and married Miss Grackle’s younger sister and took her West somewhere and spent all of her money? You know Miss Grackle never had a letter from her and she was just heartbroken. She traveled for years in the West, but



never could find a trace of her sister Melinda.'

"And Mumsie said, 'Why, Della, dear, that all happened so long ago; but wait a moment, perhaps I can remember. Oh, yes, I know now; the man's name was Donald Burnley.'"

By this time Doris was wide-eyed with excitement and eagerness, for the Sunnyside Club had done much the year before to try to comfort that lonely old lady, Miss Grackle.

"Adele!" she cried. "Was that splendid boy really Miss Grackle's nephew? Then his sick mother was her long-lost sister! Weren't you glad when you heard it, and what did you do?"

"Do?" Adele repeated with glowing eyes. "I leaped on the back of Firefly without waiting to put on a saddle, and I galloped over to Miss Grackle's house. I found her in the garden, tying up her asters. When she saw me, she came hurrying to the gate and asked eagerly, 'Why, Della, what is it?"



I know by your face that you have something to tell me.'

"I leaped from my pony and stood with the letter in my hand, and then, all of a sudden, I was afraid to tell her, for fear the shock would be too great. But, of course, she saw the letter, and asked, 'Della, have you some news for me?'

"I led her to a bench and we sat down. I told her about Eva, and said, as calmly as I could, that I had had a letter from her. Miss Grackle seemed disappointed. I suppose she was always hoping to hear from her sister, but she sat back and said that, since she remembered Eva, she would be glad to hear the letter. I read it all through, and, girls, I was so excited, but I tried not to let it show in my voice. When I came to that name, Donald Burnley, Miss Grackle gave a little cry, and I thought that she would faint, but she didn't. Instead, a joyous light shone in her face, and in a quivering voice she said, 'Oh, Della, there can be no mistake! It surely is my little lost sister,



Melinda, so far away in that lonely canyon. Maybe she is sick, and thinks that I don't care because I never wrote; but I didn't know where to write, Della, for her letters never reached me.' Then she stretched her arms out toward the west and half sobbed: 'But I do care, little sister, oh, how I do care! And I am coming to you just as soon as ever I can.'

"I thought that she must have forgotten that I was there, but she hadn't, for she turned and said, 'Della, you have brought me the greatest happiness that I have ever known in my life, and now, if you have time, I would like you to help me, as I shall try to catch the five o'clock train for Arizona.'"

"Oh, Adele," Doris said with tears in her eyes, "it turned out just like a story-book, didn't it? I was always so sorry for Miss Grackle. She was so alone in the world. She used to keep flowers in her sister's room, so that if she should happen to come home unexpectedly, it would be cheerful and waiting for her. But do tell me what happened



next. Did she get there in time to save Donald's mother?"

"Yes, indeed!" Adele replied, "and a month later Miss Grackle came back and her sister was with her. They are living in the old home now, and Mrs. Burnley is much better. Donald wanted to stay on his ranch long enough to prove up on it, and Eva writes that he is working for her Uncle Dick much of the time; he is just like a brother to the two girls."

"Eva always writes so admiringly of everything that Donald does. Don't you think that maybe she likes him a little more than she would if he was a mere brother?" the romantic Rosamond inquired.

"Oh, Rosie, of course she doesn't!" Adele replied. "Eva would dearly love an own brother if she had one. I'm sure that I do Jack."

Rosamond tossed her head and set her yellow curls to bobbing. "One might think that I had said something dreadful," she declared. "I can't see that there is any-



thing wrong in admiring a boy in a way that isn't brotherly." Then, being a very good-natured girl, as well as a very pretty one, she laughingly added, "I haven't a brother of my own, and you all know that I like somebody else's brother fairly well."

Bertha, who happened to be sitting next to Rose, slipped her arm about her as she said, "Rosamond, here and now, with the Sunnyside Club as witness, I adopt you as my sister, and then you may have Bobbie for a very own brother, but, I warn you, he is a dreadful tease when a girl is his sister."

Rosamond flushed prettily as she returned her friend's embrace. People often wondered at the strong friendship which existed between these two, for Bertha was studious and practical, while Rose preferred stories to text-books.

But Rosamond was not to be entirely crushed by her perhaps more sensible club sisters.

"Girls," she announced, "whether I am called romantic or not, I am going to



prophecy that some day Eva Dearman and Donald Burnley will be sweethearts."

"Very well, Prophetess Rose," Peggy Pierce called merrily. "We will all write your words in our memories, and time alone can tell how true they are."

Just at that moment a silvery bell tinkled from the back of the house, and Adele sprang up, calling gayly, "Now for the party part! Whoever is hungry as hungry can be, fall in line and follow me!"



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE PARTY PART

“OHEE!” the irrepressible Betty Burd squealed when Adele announced that it was time for the refreshments to be served. Then gayly the girls fell into line, Adele leading, and marched, Indian file, around the house to the back, where stood an old apple orchard, which, on this lovely May day, was pink and white with bloom. An oriole that was building its hammock-nest deep among the blossoms paused a moment to sing a joyous song as they approached. Adele held up one finger, and they stood listening until the roundelay was over; then she exclaimed brightly, “It’s stylish, you know, to provide music for your guests.”

“There are few singers, Della, whose notes are so sweet and clear,” Gertrude had



just said, when Adele again held up one finger, and this time her lips formed the word, "Hush!" She listened intently a moment, and then she whispered, "I thought that I heard some one talking right close to us, but I don't see any one at all."

Then unmistakably they all heard half-muffled laughter. It seemed to come from behind a hedge of currant bushes. Adele peered over, and then she exclaimed with pretended severity, "Bob Angel and Jack Doring, what are you doing there?"

"Hunting for currants," Bob replied mischievously, and then, with a merry laugh, he vaulted the hedge.

"Indeed, sir?" his sister Bertha remarked. "You would have to stay there a couple of months, I'm thinking, for currants do not come until after the blossoms."

"Well, now, is that so? I really am surprised," Bob gayly replied. "Aren't you, Jackie? Bertha is taking botany this year, and I suppose that's why she knows so much about it."



"Sure, I'm powerful surprised," Jack replied, as he too leaped over the hedge.

The girls, not deigning to notice them longer, had proceeded to the prettily decorated table which stood under the blossoming apple boughs, and sat on the benches which were on either side.

The two boys stood near and conversed together.

"Aha!" quoth Jack, pretending to have suddenly observed the table for the first time. "Friend Bob, what is this that we see before us? It savors of a feast! Should we linger near, perchance these tender-hearted damsels would proffer us a frosted crumb."

"Nay," Bob replied disconsolately, "I see



peared in the kitchen door, carrying a huge birthday cake. The boys gave whoops of joy, leaped into the air, clicked their heels together, and then made a wild rush at the jolly Irish woman.

“Kate, me darlint,” Jack implored, “that burden is much too heavy for you. Permit me to carry it.”

“Ye young spalpeens!” Kate replied, trying to speak crossly. “Ye scared me so I ’most dropped the cake entoirely.” Then she just had to laugh at Jack’s woeful expression, and so she added, “Take it, if ye wish, but carry it careful; and you, Bob, come into the kitchen and help dip the ice-cream.”

The boys did as they were told, and were soon busily helping Kate. Each time that they appeared with a plate of ice-cream or a glass of lemonade, they looked at the girls with comically dismal expressions, and then, on their way back to the kitchen, they took out big red cotton handkerchiefs and pretended to wipe their eyes.



The girls no longer tried to keep from laughing, for when Bob and Jack set out to be clowns, they were irresistibly funny.

When the last guest had been served the boys stood looking at the cake with long, doleful faces.

“Oh, Jack and Bob,” Adele exclaimed laughingly, “how can we be merry with you two looking as though you were at a funeral! Go into the kitchen and bring out some chairs. You may sit one at each end of the table.”

With wild whoops of joy the boys darted kitchenward, reappearing a moment later with small wooden chairs balanced on their heads, a plate heaped with ice-cream in one hand and a glass of lemonade in the other.

When they were seated, they beamed on the girls, and Jack declared, “I will speak you a piece that I once learned:

“There were two young men so benighted, they never knew when they were slighted.

They went to the party and ate just as hearty as if they'd been really invited.”



"I'll do better than that," Bob replied, as he waved his glass of lemonade in the air:

"Here's to Adele who is fourteen to-day.  
May she ever be pretty and witty and gay,  
And feed upon cake forever and aye."

"Thank you so much!" Adele merrily responded.

And then Bob, who was brimming over with the spirit of fun, lifted his glass to the girl who sat at his right.

"And here's to the maid with the golden curls,  
The fairest of all in the garden of girls.  
May she ever have whatever she wishes,  
Be it diamond rings or Haviland dishes."

"Oh, Bob," Rosamond declared, "do stop making up rhymes, and eat your ice-cream. It is almost melted. Look at Jack. He only has one spoonful left."

And so, with merry bantering and laughter, and with now and then a shower of petals fluttering about them, the delicious refreshments disappeared, and just as they had risen from the table, the postman's whistle summoned them to the front lawn, where a surprise was waiting for Adele.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE BIRTHDAY BOX

THE postman, who had known Adele since she was a baby, climbed out of the little Ford car in which were his mail-bags, for Mr. Brown had a rural route.

“Well, Della,” he said, beaming at her from under his shaggy gray eyebrows, “so this is the fifth of May and your birthday. I remember your first birthday and every one of them since, and, I declare to it, you haven’t changed a mite.”

“Oh, Mr. Brown,” Adele laughed gleefully, “haven’t I changed since I was a little wee girl?”

“Well, you’ve growed tall, of course,” the postman agreed. “But years ago, when you didn’t stand any higher than my knee, you’d come a-running out to meet me with a face



that looked like sunshine, and you'd prattle, 'Misser Bown, dot any mail for me?' And I'd give you an advertising circular or something; I always saved one of 'em for you. You ain't changed none, Della, as far as the sunnyness goes, and I'm hoping and thinking that you never will. But there," he added suddenly, turning away, "I'm forgetting my errand. I've a box here for you."

"Oh, have you really?" Adele cried eagerly. "Then it must be a birthday surprise. See, Jack, it's from Arizona! I do believe that it is something from Eva." When the box was on the grass, the happy girl turned, and, holding out her hand, she said: "Thank you, Mr. Brown. You've always been so good to bring me things."

The old man smiled down at her with a suspicion of tears in his eyes, and then mumbling, "Happy birthday, Della," he climbed into his car and drove away. Adele little knew what her bright greeting through the years had meant to the lonely man who, long



before, had lost his wife and his little girl, and who, ever since, had lived by himself.

“Let’s take the box over to that maple-tree where the cushions are,” Adele suggested. Jack had gone to get a hammer, and so Bob carried the small box to the spot indicated.

“Oh, I am so excited!” Adele exclaimed. “There is such a fascination to me about Arizona and everything that comes from there. What do you suppose will be in the box?”

“It’s something bright,” Betty Burd announced. She was on her knees, watching Jack pry off the cover.

“It looks like an Indian rug,” Peggy Pierce declared when Jack drew forth a bright-colored mat about three feet square.

“That’s just what it is!” Adele exclaimed in delight. “Do you suppose there are really, truly Indians in Arizona these days?”

“To be sure there are!” Bob replied with twinkling eyes. “Whooping, scalping In-



dians! You'd better change your mind about going there this summer, Della."

"Indeed, I will not," Adele laughingly replied. "The more excitement there is to be, the better I will like it. See! Here is a long, fat envelope tied to the rug. Sit down on the grass and I'll read this letter from Eva. It will surely tell us all about it."

In a circle they sat, and Adele spread the bright rug in the middle, where it could be properly admired. There was a background, almost the color of the desert, with a glow of sunlight, and in the center was a conventional black-and-green design that Gertrude suggested might be trees around a water-hole, while a brilliant red bird with wide-spread wings seemed to be soaring and singing in each corner.

"It must mean something joyous," Gertrude Willis declared. "You know the Indians tell stories by symbols on their baskets and rugs."

"Perhaps Eva's letter explains it," Adele replied, as she tore open the long envelope.



Then she added gleefully, "Here it is in big letters: 'The Story of Your Birthday Rug.' "

*"Silver Creek Ranch, Ariz.*

"DEAREST ADELE:

"From the Land of the Burning Sun to the Land of Apple Blossoms! Greetings to the one lassie in the world who is most truly fitted to be the queen of the May.

"There! Isn't that quite poetical? Oh, Della, how Mandy and I do wish that we could be with you on this fifth day of May, as we were last year. Never, never will I forget how kind you were to me in those first dismally lonesome days that I spent at the orphanage, and yet I'm glad now that everything happened just as it did, for it brought me you and Amanda and darling Uncle Dick and such a wonderful home on the desert.

"For the past month Mandy and I have wondered and wondered what we would send you for a birthday gift. We wanted it to be different from anything you had ever had. Time was passing and we had not found it, when one day something exciting happened, and it resulted in just the sort of gift we had wanted for you.

"Now, I will tell you the story of your birthday rug.

"It was March, and the rains had not yet



come. Every day Uncle Dick would look over toward the mountains and shake his head when he saw only the gleaming blue of the sky. 'No rain yet,' he would say, 'and the water-holes nearly dry. If it doesn't come soon, the poor cattle out on the range will surely suffer.' Then one morning he asked Mandy and me if we would like to ride to the nearest water-hole and see if it was entirely dry.

"Nothing could have delighted us more, and we were soon in our cowgirl suits and galloping away over the shining desert. The trail led along Silver Creek, which, during the dry season, has not even a trickle of water in it. Sometimes the banks of the creek rose sheer and high, and Uncle Dick explained to us that at flood time each year the torrents dug the bed deeper and deeper. 'Possibly that is the way canyons are made,' he said.

"'When the rains come,' Mandy asked, 'how long does it take the creek to fill?'

"'Not long at all,' Uncle Dick replied. 'There is often a cloudburst in the mountains; then in an hour or two the water sweeps down in a raging torrent that even the bravest horseman cannot ford.'

"The trail had led us high on a mesa. Uncle Dick drew rein, and, shading his eyes, looked away toward the south. About a mile below us there was a clump of cotton-



wood trees. These we knew grew close to a water-hole. As we watched it we saw a thin line of smoke curling up from beyond the trees. 'Aha,' Uncle Dick said. 'We have visitors, I see.'

" 'Who do you think they are?' Mandy asked.

" 'Well,' Uncle Dick replied, 'they may be cowboys riding the range. And yet they may be Mexicans; the border is only five miles from there. Or it might even be a wandering band of Indians. Perhaps you girls would better ride back.'

" 'Oh, Uncle Dick,' I pleaded, 'I do wish that you would let us go with you.' And so, rather reluctantly, he consented, and again we started riding toward the water-hole.

"As we rode around the clump of trees, Uncle Dick in the lead, we noticed that he kept one hand in the pocket of his coat, anticipating possible trouble. There were four Indian men seated near the camp fire playing a game of cards. They were rough and unkempt-looking, and for a moment I was truly frightened. They, however, paid us little attention, and, in reply to Uncle Dick's friendly greeting, they merely grunted. An old Indian woman on the other side of the fire was preparing food in an earthen vessel, while in the shade of the trees sat a slim, graceful Indian girl of about sixteen. She was weaving a rug, and when she glanced up



at us with her big dark eyes, Mandy and I thought that she was truly beautiful.

“Near her a six-year-old boy stood alert, holding a bow and arrow. Around his straight black hair was a beaded band, in front of which was a bright red feather.

“Uncle Dick, having dismounted, went toward the water-hole, and I, believing that the Indians were friendly, also dismounted and went toward the girl, leading my horse.

“‘Oh, how pretty!’ I exclaimed. ‘Mandy, do come and see this beautiful rug.’

“The Indian girl said nothing, but held up the rug that we might look at it more closely. The Indian boy, who at first had leaped away like some wild thing, now cautiously returned, and, going close to Mandy, he put out one small brown hand and touched her. ‘Nice lady,’ he said. Then, to our surprise, the Indian girl smilingly exclaimed, ‘Red Feather likes you because you wear his color.’

“Mandy had a red handkerchief tied about her neck, a red leather belt, and a band of the same color about her hat. She was delighted at the little Indian boy’s preference for her. ‘He’s a darling!’ she exclaimed.

“Just then Uncle Dick reappeared, and saying ‘Good-by,’ we mounted our horses and rode away. As soon as we were out of hearing, I asked, ‘Uncle Dick, where do you



suppose that Indian girl learned to speak such good English?'

" 'She was probably educated in one of the Government Indian schools,' Uncle Dick replied, 'and then, unfortunately, for some reason, was obliged to return to her tribe.'

"That night Mandy said, 'Eva, I wish that we might know that Indian girl better.'

"The very next day we had an experience with an Indian which very nearly cost Amanda her life."



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### AMANDA'S BRAVERY

"OH, Della!" Betty Burd exclaimed wide-eyed. "Whatever was it that happened to Amanda?"

"She must be all right now," Adele replied, "for in the beginning of her letter Eva told us that she and Mandy were sending me the birthday rug."

"Go ahead, Sis," Jack said. "Of course it turns out all right, but we want to hear what happened."

So Adele continued reading Eva's letter:

"The next morning we heard Uncle Dick up at dawn, and, hastily dressing, Mandy and I joined him at the breakfast table. He smiled in his usual cheery way, but somehow I knew that he was troubled. 'Uncle Dick, what is wrong?' I asked.

"'I am very much worried because of the long drought, Little One,' he replied. 'I



found practically no water at all in the hole yesterday. Donald Dare and Rusty Pete came in from the range last night, and they say that they passed many animals lying down, too weak from thirst to rise and come in with them. This morning we three are going to ride to the north and round up the cattle we find there and drive them in here to the wells. Rusty Pete says that the rains may come at any moment, but I can't bear to think of those poor creatures dying of thirst, so I must try to help them. You and Mandy won't mind staying alone, I am sure.'

"'Of course not,' I replied. 'Nothing will hurt us.'

"We had forgotten all about the Indians we had seen at the water-hole the day before. Half an hour later we girls went out on the porch and stood with arms about each other, watching Uncle Dick, Donald Dare, and Rusty Pete as they rode up from the corral. Donald's wiry broncho was feeling very lively, and it reared and plunged just as they were passing the porch; then, when Donald had proved that he was master, he triumphantly waved his sombrero to us.

"When they were gone, Mandy turned into the house and said, 'Eva, for weeks I have been planning to write a long letter to that nice Madge Peterson, who was so kind to us last summer. The singing lessons which she had me take at the Dorchester In-



stitute have brought me so much real happiness. Sometimes I go up on the mesa at sunrise and sing the wonderful song that dear old master taught me, "The Awakening Day." "

" 'And I will write to Madge Peterson also,' I said. 'I surely enjoyed the drawing lessons which she had me take, and some day I will make a desert sketch for her.'

"Half an hour later, our letters being written, we mounted our ponies and galloped along Silver Creek trail.

" 'How breathless and hot it is,' Mandy said. Then, chancing to look back, she whirled her pony about and exclaimed: 'Eva, do look over toward the mountains. See those heavy black clouds, and the sunshine is green. What can it mean?'

"I looked and felt suddenly frightened. 'Oh, Mandy,' I cried. 'How I do wish that Uncle Dick had remained at home! I do believe that we are going to have one of those terrible cloudbursts that he has told us about. Come, let us gallop back to the ranch as fast as we can go.'

"Even as I spoke, we heard a rumbling like distant thunder, and the mountains were hidden from our view by the falling sheet of water. It was four miles back to the ranch and still another four miles to the station, and not a shelter either way larger than a mesquite bush. Our ponies, seeming



to sense danger of some sort, with ears erect and dilating nostrils, fairly leaped over the hot, dry sand.

“The trail led along the steep bank of the creek, in which water was already appearing, and a sullen, distant roar told us that the torrent would soon be sweeping past us.

“Suddenly Mandy drew rein and there was a look of terror in her eyes. I gazed in the direction which she indicated and saw a small boy happily chasing a butterfly down in the river bed at a place where the banks rose a sheer six feet on either side.

“‘It’s little Red Feather,’ Mandy said. ‘He’s all alone, and he doesn’t know the danger he is in. Eva, I must save him.’

“Before I realized what she was about, Mandy leaped from her pony and was scrambling down the steep embankment.

“The Indian boy looked up when she called to him, and, not understanding her cry of alarm, like some wild thing he sprang away from her, running toward the Indian camp, a mile up-stream, and in the direction from which the mountain torrent was being hurled.

“‘Come back, Mandy,’ I shouted. ‘You can’t save him now.’ But she did not seem to hear. Suddenly a rush of water whirled around a steep cliff, and the Indian boy, frightened and bewildered, paused. Mandy overtook him, caught him in her arms, and



ran toward the bank. This I saw she could not possibly climb. The whirling, surging water was up to her knees, and the roaring torrent was close upon us. I looked everywhere across the desert, but saw no horseman whom I could hail. If only I had brought a lariat, I thought wildly, I might have thrown it over to her; but I had nothing. I was powerless to help! The rapidly deepening water was up to Mandy's waist, and I saw that she had lost her footing and was being swept down the stream. In another moment, with a deafening roar, the torrent was madly plunging between the high banks, and Mandy, helpless as a leaf, was hurled far out of my sight.

"Faint and weak, I mounted my pony and started in the direction of the ranch, hoping and praying that help would come to us. My prayer was answered, for suddenly a horseman appeared on the mesa trail, and then another.

"I shouted, but knowing that my voice could not be heard above the torrent, I stood up in my stirrups and waved frantically, hoping that at least I would be seen. To my joy the horseman in the lead waved his sombrero in reply and started galloping in my direction, the other following. As they drew nearer, I saw that it was Uncle Dick and Rusty Pete. How thankful I was. Uncle Dick's face was pale when he saw the



riderless pony. 'Where is Mandy?' he asked anxiously.

"Rapidly I told him what had happened. Without a word he whirled his horse and galloped down the stream. Rusty Pete and I followed. As we neared the bank I dreaded looking over into the surging torrent. Suddenly Uncle Dick drew rein and pointed toward the opposite cliff. How I hoped that by some miracle Mandy might have been saved!

"What I saw was the Indian boy, Red Feather, crouching on a small ledge, watching with wide, startled eyes the water that was surging beneath him. But Mandy—where was Mandy?

"Again I felt faint, but right at that moment I heard a joyful shout from Rusty Pete, who had ridden farther down the stream. Uncle Dick and I galloped to his side, and, looking across the creek, I beheld a sight that I shall never forget. Our Mandy, with torn hands, was clinging to a mesquite bush on the opposite bank, the rushing water whirling about her, as though determined to drag her away.

"There's not a second to lose," Uncle Dick cried, leaping from his horse. 'That bush won't hold much longer.' But even before he had spoken Rusty Pete had plunged into the torrent and was battling his way toward the opposite bank. Dear



brave Mandy heard his reassuring shout and smiled faintly. I knew that her strength was almost gone, that she could not hold on much longer, even if the bush held.

"Rusty Pete had reached the middle of the stream when a fresh torrent was hurled at him from above. He was swept from his course and in that same moment the mesquite bush was uprooted, and Mandy—— I closed my eyes to shut out the sight, but opened them again when I heard a triumphant shout. There was Rusty Pete standing on the opposite bank with Mandy, weak and limp, in his arms. Uncle Dick, seeing that she was safe, made his way farther up-stream and rescued the Indian boy.

"To my surprise, for I never had seen a mountain torrent, the water was going down rapidly, and in a very short time it was quiet enough for the cowboy to carry Mandy to our side of the stream. Silently he mounted his horse, and, holding her in front of him, rode toward the ranch. I took Red Feather in front of me and followed. A cold misty rain was beating in our faces, but I was so anxious about Mandy I scarcely noticed it."



## CHAPTER NINE

### THE INDIAN RUG

"OH, that brave, brave girl!" Doris Drexel said with tears in her eyes. "I never would have had so much courage. What happened next, Della?"

"I suppose we never can tell what we would do until we see some one in real danger," Adele replied, and then she continued reading Eva's letter:

"For two long hours Mandy seemed too weak to open her eyes or speak to us. I stayed close to her bed, anxiously watching for some sign of returning consciousness. For the first time I clearly realized how very dear she was to me.

" 'Do not worry about our brave Mandy, Little One,' Uncle Dick said, as he came in for a moment and stood beside me. 'She is very, very weary now, and it will be days before she is quite herself again.'

" 'Oh, Uncle Dick,' I half sobbed, 'wasn't Mandy wonderful!'



“‘Yes,’ he replied earnestly. ‘She was just that. Rusty Pete can’t get over marveling at her courage and bravery. We have been down at the corral, opening the wells to catch all that we can of this precious rain, and time and again he said to me, “Think of it, Mr. Dearman; that mere slip of a girl facing a mountain torrent just to save a no-account Indian boy.”’

“When Uncle Dick was gone, and I was again alone in the room, which seemed strangely still, I thought over what he had said, and suddenly I realized that I had not seen the Indian boy since we entered the house. ‘Where could he be? Perhaps he has started for the water-hole where his tribe is camping,’ I thought, ‘and yet he would hardly go out in all this storm.’

“The rain, which at first had been but a cold, misty sleet, had now settled into a steady downpour. I was glad for the sake of the cattle dying of thirst out on the range. It was growing damp and chilly in that silent room, when Bonita entered with an armful of mesquite roots, which she threw on the grate. They were dry and burned brightly, making the room cheerier.

“‘Bonita,’ I asked, ‘have you seen the little Indian boy who was with us when we first came?’

“‘No, Señorita,’ Bonita replied.

“When she was gone, I drew close to the



fire. It was only mid-afternoon, but it was growing very dark. Suddenly I heard a rustling noise. I sprang up, feeling sure that Mandy had wakened, but she was still quietly sleeping. 'Then there must be some one else in the room,' I thought, but I saw no one. Again I heard the sound, and this time it was like a faint sob. It seemed to come from under the bed. Stooping, I looked, and to my surprise I saw Red Feather crouching in the far, dark corner, crying softly.

"I called him and he came to me. I led him to the chair by the fire, and, lifting him to my lap, I held him close. To my surprise, he clung to me just as any other child would have done. Somehow I had supposed that Indians were without feeling. Then I remembered how frightened the little fellow must have been out in the raging torrent. 'Dear little laddie,' I said soothingly, 'why do you cry?'

" 'Red Feather wants Winona,' he replied with a sob.

" 'Winona must be the beautiful Indian girl who was weaving the rug,' I thought; and aloud I said, 'Wait until the rain is over and Winona will come for her little Red Feather.' But I was to learn that a sister's love heeds not a storm, for even as I spoke, Bonita opened the door and said: 'Señorita, quick! Look from the window.



Horsemen are coming, and I think they are Indians.'

"I sprang up and looked out. At first I could see only the beating rain, but soon, through the mist, I saw a line of wiry mustangs coming single file down the mesa trail, and as they approached I made out that the riders were bronze-skinned Indians. In the lead was an old Indian who sat erect. He wore a large, heavy blanket with red and white bars about it. He was Gray Hawk, the chief. Following him were six younger braves in buckskin, and then came Winona, riding a small black horse. She, too, was protected from the storm by a heavy blanket. Several small burros, packed with coyote skins, ended the train. They were nearing the ranch house, and I could see the eager expression on the face of the Indian girl. Red Feather, who had also been watching, uttered a cry of joy and leaped away from me. Glancing at Mandy and seeing that she was quietly sleeping, I followed him. When I reached the porch Uncle Dick was talking to Gray Hawk, and Red Feather, like a little wild animal, was scrambling up to the back of the small horse that his sister rode. Winona's arm held him close and her black eyes shone with a great happiness. Then it was that I learned that love is the same, whatever the color of the skin may be.



“Winona rode nearer the porch and listened with eager attention while Rusty Pete told how Mandy had saved Red Feather’s life. Then, unstrapping her pack, she took from it the finished rug that we had seen her weaving, and held it out to me, saying, ‘Give this to Red Feather’s nice lady, and tell her that Winona will save her life some day if she can.’

“And then they silently rode away, and I stood watching them until they were gray, shadowy figures in the misty rain.

“When Mandy was able to sit up, I gave her the rug, and she joyously exclaimed: ‘Oh, Eva, we have been wishing that we had something different and beautiful for Adele’s birthday present. I would like to send her Winona’s rug.’”

When Adele finished reading she looked up with tears in her eyes and said: “But I can’t keep this wonderful rug. It never could really belong to any one but to dear, brave Amanda. I shall take it back to her when I go.” Then she added brightly, “How I do hope that some day I am to meet that beautiful Indian girl.”

Adele’s wish was to be fulfilled under very exciting circumstances.



## CHAPTER TEN

### A WONDERFUL INVITATION

A WEEK later Adele, skipping into the house after school, called merrily, "Adorable Mumsie, where are you?"

"Up in the sewing-room," a sweet voice replied. And Adele, leaping up the stairs, whirled into the sunny room, and, throwing her arms about her mother, exclaimed, "Mumsie, do you notice how grown-up and dignified I act now that I am fourteen years old and almost a young lady?"

Before Mrs. Doring could reply, the side door down below closed rather noisily and a boy's voice called, "Mummie, where are you?"

"Up-stairs," the mother responded with a rush of tenderness in her heart for these two whose first words each day when they came home from school were, "Mother, where are you?"



Jack climbed the stairs two steps at a time, which was so unusual for her rather indolent son that Mrs. Doring looked up in surprise. That good-looking boy tossed his cap in the air as he exclaimed, "Mummie, I've been thinking all the way from school that I'd give everything and one thing more if I could really go West this summer and try my skill at broncho busting."

Adele's eyes were shining. "And, oh, wouldn't I love to go! Do you suppose Mr. Dearman really meant it when he invited us?"

"Why, I supposed that he did," Mrs. Doring replied. "Has Eva mentioned it lately in her letters?"

Adele shook her head.

"Ho! There's the postman this minute," Jack declared, as he fairly leaped down the stairs to the door, returning a second later with an envelope in his hand.

"Who is the letter for, Jackie?" Adele eagerly asked.

"It's for a young lady who has a brown



braid with a red ribbon on it," that youth replied.

"Oh, goody," Adele called out as she sprang from the low stool on which she had been sitting at her mother's feet. "Do let me have it, Jack." But, just to tease, her tall brother held the letter high over her head.

"Not until you guess where it is from," he declared.

"Oh, that is just ever so easy, for I have only three correspondents in all the world, so it must be one of them. I am going to guess first that it is from Eva Dearman, because I am so eager to hear from her."

"Right you are, Sis," Jack declared as he handed her the envelope. "See, it's post-marked 'Silver Creek, Arizona.'"

"How I do love to get letters from the desert," Adele said as she reseated herself on the low stool and tore open the envelope. Jack, also interested, sat astride a chair, prepared to listen.

"Read it aloud, Pet," Mrs. Doring said.



"We all like to hear from Eva." And so she read:

"DEARLY BELOVED ADELE:

"I am so excited about some news that I have to tell you that my pen fairly dances; that's why it is making such wiggly letters. I know I ought to keep you in suspense for a time and try to make you guess my wonderful news, but I am so eager to tell you that I just can't.

"About the middle of June my Uncle Dick will have to go to Chicago, and he told me to write to Mrs. Doring and say that if she is willing that you should travel that far alone, he will personally conduct you over the Rockies. Now, Della, write by return post and tell me that you will come.

"Love from Mandy and Eva.

"P. S.—It's an hour later. Uncle Dick just came riding in from the range and I told him that I had been writing to you. 'Good!' he said. 'And tell Adele to be sure to bring her brother Jack along, for I need another cowboy to help me this summer, and he may have the position, if he thinks he would like it.'"

"Whoopla!" Jack cried, leaping from the chair and capering about like a young Indian. "The wild and woolly West for me.



I thought I was going to be left out at first. Three cheers for Uncle Dick."

"But, Jackie, Mother hasn't yet said that we may go," Adele exclaimed.

"Of course Mummie will be delighted to have us go," Jack declared, as he sat on the arm of his mother's chair.

"You did tell Mr. Dearman that I might visit Eva this summer if an older person happened to be traveling to the West, didn't you, Mumsie?" Adele asked eagerly.

The mother smiled at her pleading children, and then, rising, she exclaimed: "I hear a car coming up the drive. I believe it is your father returning. We will go and meet him, and if he says that you may spend the summer in Arizona, why, then, of course you may."

"Oh, you dear, adorable Mumsie!" Adele exclaimed, as she gave her mother an impulsive bear-hug.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### A MOMENT OF SUSPENSE

MR. DORING was just stepping from his car, when Adele fairly flew down the side-porch steps and leaped upon him, almost choking him with the vigor of her embrace.

"Well! Well!" he laughingly exclaimed, when she had released him. "What was that you told me last week about being fourteen now and a dignified young lady?"

"Oh, Giant Daddy," Adele cried, "how could one be dignified when one is so excited about something? Here's Mumsie and Jack. They will tell you what the 'something' is, and, Giant Daddy, please, please, please, say Yes." This last was whispered into her wondering father's ear.

"You would better wait until we are at dinner, Adele," Mrs. Doring suggested.



"Kate says everything is ready to serve this very minute."

"Don't tell Dad until I come in," Jack called, as he leaped into the car and drove it to the garage.

A few minutes later a happy family was gathered around the table in the dining-room, and Kate, having served the soup, was lingering to hear what her little "darlints" were so excited about.

"Well, now," their father exclaimed, as he looked from one eager face to another, "do tell me what has happened. It must be something very unusual, for I haven't seen Jack so wide-awake in a long time."

Jack, having grown rapidly of late, was inclined to be indolent in his manner and indisposed to do anything requiring effort.

"Mumsie, you tell the news," Adele said, and her mother smilingly complied.

"When the children came home from school this afternoon," she began, "they were both saying how they did wish that they could go to Arizona and spend the summer



on Mr. Dearman's ranch. It surely sounds just like a story-book, for right at that moment the postman came and brought Adele a letter from Eva, and in it she invited them both to come the middle of June, for Mr. Dearman is to be in Chicago on business at that time and will escort them over the Rockies."

"Isn't that just wonderful news?" Adele cried with glowing eyes. "And you never, never could say No, could you, Giant Daddy?"

"It will be the making of me, Dad," Jack declared eagerly. "Can't you just see me riding bucking bronchos and lassoing wild cattle?"

Mr. Doring laughed merrily.

"No, Jack," he replied, "I do not find that an easy picture to visualize. What I do see quite plainly is a bucking broncho throwing my son and heir over his head."

Jack flushed, but he replied earnestly, "Of course, Dad, I would expect to be thrown a few times, but in the end I know I



would conquer. What other men have done, surely I ought to be able to do."

"That's the right spirit, son," his father heartily exclaimed; "and I gladly give my consent to the journey, believing that it will bring lessons of inestimable value to both you and Adele."

It would have been hard to find two happier young people in all the world just at that moment.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

"I'm so excited," Adele confided to the Sunny Six one morning as they crossed the meadows, yellow and white with daisies and buttercups, on their way to school. "I couldn't possibly cram for exams this year the way we did last. Yesterday I took my books over to the woods, thinking that it would be quiet there for a little review, but I just couldn't keep my mind on the lessons. Instead of maps and problems, I was seeing visions in which I was galloping over the desert with Eva and Mandy. Oh, girls, isn't it just too wonderful that I can go!"

The Sunny Six tried to appear enthusiastic, but they were all feeling a bit sad because they were to lose their dear Adele.

"It's selfish of me, I know," Betty Burd exclaimed impulsively, "but your going



away, Della, makes me feel as gloomy as a funeral."

"Why, Betsy," Peggy Pierce protested, "didn't we agree not to let Della know how lonesome we were going to be without her?"

"Oh, girls," Adele cried, tears springing to her eyes, "shall you really miss me that much? How I do wish that I could take you all with me! But since I can't, I'll write you a volume of a letter every week, and you take it over to our little log cabin and read it aloud. Then I want every one of you to answer it. Receiving mail must be great fun out on the desert, when you have to ride eight miles on horseback to get it."

"That's one thing, Adele, they won't have to teach you," Bertha Angel declared with pride. "I don't believe there is a cowgirl in all Arizona who can ride better than you can."

"Thanks, Burdie," Adele replied, "but I am not so confident. I fear that a well-fed, respectable little pony like mine is quite dif-



ferent from a wild and wiry mustang, but if only I can stick on, the wilder they are the better I shall like it."

May passed and June came. The apple-blossoms fell to the ground, but the Doring home was still a bower of loveliness, for the rose vines that clambered over the verandas were white and gold with bloom, and the air was sweet with the fragrance of honeysuckle. Too, there were late lilacs still blossoming at the gate.

Each morning when the robins that lived just outside of Adele's open window awoke with a joyous, cheery song, that maiden would leap from her bed, and, skipping to her calendar, would make a red cross on the date. "One day nearer to my wonderful journey," she would think gleefully, as she would climb back into bed to await the call of the rising bell.

And in due time there arrived on that calendar the last day of school.

Adele and her friends passed with high



marks, and when she parted from them at the cross-roads, she fairly danced home, humming snatches of a happy song. Skipping into the house, she called, as she always did, "Mumsie, where are you?" But this time there was no reply.

For a moment she looked puzzled; then she remembered something, and, catching her white Persian cat from the sunny cushion where he was comfortably slumbering, she exclaimed rebukingly, "Muffie Doring, how can you spend your time sleeping in that lazy way, when something so very exciting is about to happen? Don't you know that your mistress is going 'way to Arizona to stay just ever so long, and that Mother Doring has gone to the city this very day to buy a new trunk? Just think of that, Cuddle-Cat! Your mistress is going to have a big trunk all her very own, with her name on it—something she never had before, though, to be sure, she never needed one, this being her very first journey. There now, isn't that exciting?"



The Persian cat evidently did not think so, for, after having opened wondering pink eyes for one moment, he lazily closed them again and went to sleep in Della's arms. That lassie snuggled him close and then replaced him on his sunny cushion.

"I'll hunt up Kate," she said to herself. "There I shall surely find more sympathy."

"Katie," she called, as she skipped toward the kitchen. A tearful voice replied, and, to her surprise, Adele saw the faithful servant, who had lived with them for so long that she seemed like one of the family, sitting by the kitchen table paring potatoes with telltale eyes, red and swollen.

"Why, Kate," Adele exclaimed in amazement, for never before had she seen the Irish woman in tears. "What has happened?"

"Oh, Little Colleen!" Kate sobbed afresh. "When I think of the wild Indians that may be afther scalpin' ye and me little boy, Jack, 'way out there in that dreadful desert counthry, how kin I help but be afther cryin'?"

Adele could hardly keep from laugh-



ing, for it really was funny, and yet she dearly loved Kate, and so she said, "Why, Katie, you've been reading a book about the West as it used to be. I saw it here in the kitchen yesterday, but I thought that it belonged to Jack. I don't wonder that you were frightened, but Arizona is just as law-abiding *now* as our very own State; I heard Giant Daddy say so last night. And the few Indians that are left are peaceful traders. They don't go on the war-path as they did years ago."

Kate, much relieved, wiped her eyes and then drew a paper-covered book from beneath her apron. It was open at a picture which might well have struck terror into the heart of the bravest, for a dozen wild Indians were leaping around a fire, and one of them, with lifted tomahawk, was about to scalp a boy, who, with a little stretch of the imagination, might be said to resemble Jack.

Rising and smiling through her tears, Kate said rather wistfully, "I'm afther wantin' ye and Jackie to have a foine toime,



Colleen, but I don't want nuthin' to happen to ye. I couldn't be afther lovin' young uns of me own more than I do the two of ye."

"I know it, Kate," Adele said tenderly, "and we love you, too; you have always been so kind to us, even when we teased and bothered you. We'll write you a long letter just as soon as we get to the ranch. Oh, there's the door-bell!" she added.

"Company, like as not," Kate said dolefully. "And me not fit to open the door."

"I'll open it, Katie," Adele declared gayly. "Door-bells are real exciting, aren't they? One never can tell just what one is going to find there."

This time Adele found something interesting awaiting her. Can you think what it was?



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### JOYOUS PREPARATIONS

WHEN Adele danced to the front door she wondered whom she would find there. Perhaps her mother had returned from the city, or it might be just a caller. But when the door was swung open, there stood a big pleasant-faced man in overalls, who carried a large trunk on his shoulder.

“Good evening, ma’am,” he said. “Does Della Doring live here?”

“Oh, yes, indeed,” Adele exclaimed joyfully. “And this is my new trunk? Please put it right here in the library,” she added, as she led the way. Then, when the man was gone, she called, “Katie, oh, Katie, do come quick and see my be-au-ti-ful new trunk.” And when Kate appeared, the happy girl added: “Isn’t it nice and shiny?”



I do hope it won't get all scratched up, but I suppose it will. Baggage men don't care much, even if it is the very first trunk a person ever had. Oh, goody! Here come the girls."

Kate, not wishing her red eyes to be seen, beat a hasty retreat kitchenward, while Adele danced to the front door, and, throwing it wide open, she called gayly, "This way, young ladies, if you wish to see something new and handsome."

"Oh, Della," Betty Burd cried, clapping her hands gleefully. "If it isn't a trunk! Doesn't it make you feel grown-upish to own one all by yourself?"

"And here are your initials on this end of it," Peggy Pierce declared.

"Isn't it a big one?" Bertha said admiringly.

"Yes, it is pretty large," Adele agreed; "but, you see, Mumsie thought that since we don't need very many clothes out on the desert, perhaps Jack and I might use the same trunk."



"I wish you could open it and see what the inside looks like," Betty Burd said.

"Maybe the key is in that little envelope tied to the handle," Doris Drexel suggested.

It was, so Adele fitted it in the lock, and, lifting the cover, she gave a cry of delight.

"Why, I declare, if there isn't something in the hat-box part," she said. "Oh, girls, do look! It's a wide-brimmed felt hat, with a red scarf around it, like the one Eva wore when she had her picture taken."

"Try it on, Della, and let's see how becoming it is," Rosamond Wright had just exclaimed, when they heard the front door close, and in walked Bob Angel and Jack Doring.

"Oh, Jackie!" Adele cried, as she danced over to her brother. "If you ever had any doubts about our really, truly going, here is proof positive that we are. See, Mumsie has bought me a cowgirl hat."

"Maybe there's a suit to match in the under part," Doris Drexel suggested. The upper trays were lifted out, and underneath



lay two large bundles, one marked with Adele's name and the other with Jack's.

Amidst exclamations of admiration, the two bundles were opened and the khaki suits spread out.

"Oh-h!" Betty Burd sighed wistfully. "I do wish the days of magic would return."

"Why, Little One," Gertrude Willis inquired, "what would you ask for?"

"A great big airplane," the youngest girl replied, "that could carry every one of us out to the desert with Adele and Jack."

"Well, I surely do wish that you all could go with us," Della exclaimed earnestly.

"Although the days of magicians are supposed to be over," Jack declared, "the strangest things do happen sometimes, so keep hoping, Betty."

Such hustle and bustle as went on in the Doring home during the week following. The big new trunk stood open in the sunny sewing-room up-stairs, and Adele was receiving her first lesson in packing.



"It really is quite an art to know how to put things in so that they will be snug and not shake around," her mother told her; "and you know, Della, when you return you will not have me to help you."

"Oh, Mumsie darling," Adele exclaimed, as she dropped an armful of clothes on a chair and turned to give her mother a bear-hug, "the going away is ever so exciting, but the coming back will be even more wonderful, for, after you and I have been apart for three long months, won't we be glad to see each other though, and what hosts and hosts of things we will have to talk about."

For a moment the mother held her daughter close. This would be the very first time that these two had ever been parted, even for a day, and three months seemed so long.

"Della," she said tenderly, "promise me not to be reckless. Remember that you are the only little girl that I have. Sometimes you act so impulsively that you do not take time to think of what might happen."

"I know it, Mumsie," Adele confessed,



"but Eva is different, and then Brother Jack will be along, and he will take good care of me."

"I am sure that he will," the mother said cheerfully, and the packing lesson was resumed.

Jack's merry whistle in the lower hall was soon heard, and Della called, "Buddie, bring me the things you want packed." A moment later that tall boy appeared in the doorway with an armful of clothes and two tennis-rackets.

"Why, Jonathan Doring," Adele exclaimed in amazement. "Who ever heard of anybody's playing tennis out on the desert? You never did, I am sure of that."

"Well, then, I'll start something new," Jack declared. "I've simply got to keep in trim for the tennis tournament at South High next fall."

"There'll be plenty of room in the trunk for the net," Mrs. Doring said; "and I'm sure I don't see why tennis might not be played in one place as well as another."



Tennis was the one game which Jack enjoyed, and at which he was willing to exert himself.

After the trunk was strapped and locked, and the key put carefully in the little hand-satchel that was a present from Giant Father, the expressman came and carried it away. "There!" Adele declared jubilantly. "Now I feel sure that we are really and truly going. Sometimes I have wondered if it might not all be a dream, and I've been afraid that I might wake up and find that it was. Oh, Jack, isn't life like a story-book? The title of ours just now is 'The Country Boy and Girl Start on a Journey All Alone, out into the Wide, Wide World.' How I do hope that we are going to have an exciting adventure."

The very next day their exciting adventures began.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### A RACE WITH THE LIMITED

EARLY the next morning the Doring family arrived at the station to await the coming of the westward bound train. Giant Father took Jack with him to buy the tickets and check the trunk.

"When you return, my boy," he said, "you will have this to do all alone, so it is well for you to see how it is done."

Jack, feeling quite important, folded the long tickets and carefully placed them in his pocketbook.

"Be sure that you don't lose them," his mother cautioned when they rejoined the waiting group.

"Oh, wouldn't it be dreadful if he did!" Adele exclaimed. "I suppose the conductors would put us right off the train,



even if we were in the middle of an alkali desert, and we'd die of thirst or something."

Jack laughed as he assured his sister that no such dire fate awaited them. Just at that moment they heard a merry chorus of voices behind them, and half a dozen boys and girls surrounded the travelers. Adele's arms were filled with flowers, magazines, and boxes of candy.

"Oh, Della dear," Betty Burd whispered as she nestled close to her favorite, "I've nine minds to hide in the baggage car and go with you."

Adele smiled lovingly at the little girl, and then turned, for her friends were all clamoring for her attention.

"Send us post-cards from all along the road, won't you?" Peggy Pierce said.

"And write us a long, long letter the moment you arrive," Doris Drexel added.

Adele laughingly agreed, and then, glancing at her wrist-watch, she exclaimed, "I don't see why the other girls don't come. The train will be here in three minutes, and



I just can't go so far away without saying good-by to Gertrude and Bertha and Rosamond."

"I don't understand it, either," Jack declared. "Bob Angel told me early this morning that he was going to bring the girls over in his car, and that he would surely be here long before train time."

Adele glanced anxiously down the road, but not even a distant cloud of dust promised the arrival of her missing friends. Of all the girls, Gertrude was the one whom she most loved, and she did so want to see her to say good-by.

At that moment there was a shrill whistle around the bend that announced the coming of the train. Then, forgetting every one else, Adele clung to her mother and father, and tears, that she had hoped would not come, all unheeded rolled down her cheeks and fell among the flowers, but her eyes were shining.

Giant Father found their section on the train, and when they were settled, they



leaned out of the open window, waving a last farewell until they were quite out of sight. Then Adele looked at Jack dolefully as she said: "I'm not sure that going on a journey is so nice after all. I just know I'll be homesick for Mumsie when it gets dark. Oh, Buddie, I'm certainly glad I brought you along."

Then, after a thoughtful moment, she added, "I do think it is so queer that Gertrude did not get to the station to say good-by. It doesn't seem a bit like her."

"The machine must have broken down," Jack declared. "I know Bob intended to bring them."

Suddenly they realized that there was some excitement among the other passengers. Every one was looking out of the windows toward the highway. Jack looked also, and what he saw was a big touring-car racing at top speed, trying to keep up with the flying limited.

"That driver must be mad," a man behind them was saying. "There is a dangerous



crossing just ahead of us, and, at the speed at which he is going, there is almost bound to be a collision."

Adele, with wide, startled eyes, clutched Jack's arm and waited.

"Oh, Jackie," she whispered, "I did wish that something exciting would happen, but I've changed my mind. I don't want anything to happen at all. Do you think that it will?"

Jack looked very grave, and there was a terror in his heart that he did not express to his sister, who was frightened enough as it was.

Jack believed that he had recognized the car. He was almost sure that he knew who the driver was. Too, he knew about the crossing, and now they were almost upon it. Surely that driver would slow up and let the train pass first, but instead the train seemed to be slowing and the car plunging ahead. What could it mean? He leaned out of the window and was amazed to see the automobile turn at the crossing. He sank



back, hoping that at least he was mistaken as to whom the driver might be. He expected every moment there would be a crash, but the tensivity of his feeling was broken by the man back of him, who exclaimed, "I swan! I clean forgot that they built a trestle over this crossing only last month. Probably the driver of that car knows this road better than we do."

Jack, with a sigh of relief, breathed freely once more, and a second later the train was slowing down as they entered the city of Dorchester. As soon as they had stopped in the station, Adele heard familiar voices back of them, and how surprised she was to see four of their best friends coming down the aisle. Springing to her feet, she threw her arms about the tall girl in the lead.

"Oh, Trudie! Trudie!" she half sobbed. "How did you get here? Were you in that mad car that was almost run down at the crossing?"

Gertrude held her friend close as she re-



plied, "We were in that car, Della, but we were not in danger."

Meanwhile Bob was explaining to Jack that a puncture had prevented his reaching the Sunnyside station on time.

"That surely was pretty reckless driving," Jack was saying to Bob. "You had me scared all right. You see, I recognized the car almost from the start, but I didn't tell Sis, and I'm glad now that I didn't."

"That's a fine bit of road," Bob declared with enthusiasm. "If the highway were that good all the way to Arizona, I do believe I would keep right on going."

"Let's," Rosamond suggested.

"Please don't," Adele pleaded. "I would love to have you go with us, but I'd heaps rather have you ride in the train. If I had to watch your car plunging along, all the way to Silver Creek, there wouldn't be much left of me when we got there."

"I declare, I do believe that the train is starting!" Bertha Angel exclaimed. "We'll



be taken along whether we want to go or not, if we don't get off pretty quick."

"Good-by! Good-by!" Adele called a moment later through the open car-window. "I'm so glad that I saw you, but, Bob, do drive home slowly, won't you?"

When the train was again under way, Adele sank back on the seat as she said: "Well, that's the end of Chapter One. What do you suppose Chapter Two will be?"



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### A TELEGRAM FOR JACK

THE ride toward Chicago was uneventful in one way, that is, no startling event occurred, but every moment was filled with something new and wonderful to Adele, who had never ridden in a sleeper, or eaten in a dining-car.

Early the next morning they were at breakfast, and Adele, while waiting for the order to be brought in, sat watching the flying landscape through the wide, sunny window.

“Oh, Jack,” she exclaimed, with shining eyes, “isn’t it all just too wonderful! Do you suppose that every one is as interested when they first cross the country as we are?”

Jack, who was feeling very grown-up and



important as guide and protector for his young sister, smiled at her eagerness. Adele continued, "Isn't the country flat around here! It ought to help one a lot with geography, seeing things with one's own eyes this way. I suppose if Gertrude or Bertha were along, they would have note-books and jot things down. They are both such real students, it would do them much more good to travel than it does me, I suppose."

The cakes, syrup, and glasses of milk having arrived, silence reigned, to be broken a moment later by Adele's question, "Jackie, whatever shall we do if we miss Eva's uncle in Chicago? It is such a big place, Daddy said, and we have to cross it to get the train for Arizona."

"Don't you worry, Sis," Jack replied. "I could pilot you safely across Chicago if it were necessary, but, of course, it will not be. Mr. Dearman is sure to be there."

After another silence Adele leaned over and said very softly, "Jack, don't look now, but after a second turn around and see the



big man who is alone at the table in the far end of the car. He looks exactly as though he had stepped off a moving-picture screen. I do believe he is a cattle man or a sheriff or something. I just know that I am going to love everybody and everything in this wonderful West."

Jack smiled at his sister's enthusiasm, and, as they left the diner, he glanced at the man whom Adele had described. He was a big, broad-shouldered Westerner, in a khaki suit and leather leggings. His face had evidently been tanned by many a summer's exposure to desert sun and wind, but the blue-gray eyes that looked out at them twinkled in a way that made the young people feel confident that this stranger would be a most agreeable traveling companion if only they were acquainted with him.

When they returned to their Pullman, they found that their berth had been made up and they settled themselves comfortably for the last hour's run to Chicago.

Jack bought a morning paper, but Adele



declared that one could read a newspaper at home, and that when she was traveling she intended to keep watching, for fear she would miss seeing some point of interest. Her roving eyes soon saw the typical Westerner enter their car, and, to her surprise, he took the seat just ahead of them, and, opening a morning paper, began to read.

The train was slowing down at a station when Adele saw a messenger boy leap upon the steps and a moment later appear in their doorway, calling, "Is John Doring aboard this car?"

"John Doring!" Adele exclaimed. "Why, Jack, that must be you! See, a messenger boy is calling your name and he has a telegram. Oh, oh, what can it mean?"

Jack, fearing that something had happened at home, sprang to his feet. Beckoning to the boy, he signed the book, and, taking the yellow envelope, sank down in his seat, dreading to open it. However, he did so, and gave a sigh of relief when he had read the message, which assured the stranger



in the seat ahead of them that the news had not been what the boy dreaded.

"What is it, Jack?" Adele asked anxiously.

"It's a wire from Mr. Dearman, saying that he will be unable to meet us at Chicago, as he has been delayed farther West," the boy replied. "He says that we are to make inquiries of the men in uniform at the station, and that then we shall have no trouble in crossing the city."

"Oh, Jackie!" Adele exclaimed dismally. "Isn't that just what I said at breakfast this morning, that something might happen to keep Mr. Dearman from meeting us. Now, what shall we do?"

"Sis, don't you go to worrying," Jack replied. "I'll be sixteen next month, and if a fellow can't pilot one girl and one trunk across any city at that age, he doesn't amount to much."

"Why, Jackie, of course you can do it," Adele assured him, seeing that she had wounded his pride. "And then, I suppose,



all we shall have to do is to ask the conductor to stop the train at Silver Creek, when we reach Arizona."

When Adele said that, the stranger ahead of them turned in his seat and inquired: "Are you young people bound for Silver Creek, Arizona?"

"Yes, we are," Jack replied. "We are going to spend the summer on Mr. Richard Dearman's cattle ranch, Bar X."

"Well, now, is that so?" the Westerner exclaimed heartily as he stood up. "I'm going close to that place myself, and if you haven't any objections, I'll turn my seat right over and we'll be traveling companions from this minute on till we get to Douglas."

The young people surely had no objections to offer. Jack liked the bluff Westerner at once, and as for Adele, she felt safe again, for she had dreaded crossing the city without an experienced guide.

"My name is Daniel Moore," the stranger continued, "and your names I have already gathered to be Adele and Jack Doring.



Ha!" he exclaimed, glancing out of the car-window and noting that they were entering the outskirts of the city. "We became acquainted just in the nick of time, for here we are in Chicago."

After that, all was hustle and bustle, and when they found themselves in the vast station, being pushed and shoved by hurrying crowds, Jack, though he never would have confessed it, was secretly glad that a pair of broad shoulders ahead were forging a way for them through the masses of surging humanity, out to the waiting transfer bus.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### AN EXCITING HOLD-UP

THE ride on the transfer bus across Chicago was of great interest to Adele, who sat silently watching the skillful way in which the driver piloted them through vehicles of every description. At last, turning to Jack, she said, "How can people deliberately choose to live in such a noisy place? I much prefer Sunnyside myself, where one can hear the robins sing."

Mr. Moore, their traveling companion, smiled down at her in his genial way, as he added: "And I much prefer the wide, silent desert. I really believe, Miss Adele, that you are going to like it as much as I do."

"Oh, I know that I shall just love it," the girl replied, and then, as the bus was drawing up to the curb, she was again absorbed in watching all that happened with wide-



eyed interest. Mr. Moore led them through the crowds to the waiting train, and how pleased they were to find that their berths were in the same Pullman. Adele and Jack had a section to themselves. Mr. Moore gladly agreed to sit with them, and when the train was speeding across country, and Chicago had been left far behind, that kindly Westerner told the young people about his life on the desert. They learned that, with his partners, Tom and Tim Slater, he owned an extensive cattle ranch ten miles south of Mr. Dearman's. Adele was pleased to hear that Mr. Tom Slater had a daughter of about her own age. Eva had once mentioned that there was a girl neighbor whom she had never seen, because at that time she was away at boarding-school.

He told them many interesting stories of life on the desert as it had been years before, when, once a month, at the full of the moon, there had been an Indian raid on some white man's ranch. And, too, in reply to Jack's question, he told them that he had



been personally acquainted with Black Jack, Arizona's notorious though gentlemanly train robber.

Adele's eyes were wide with startled interest.

Mr. Moore smiled down at her reassuringly as he said: "But those days of thrilling adventure are far in the past. Here comes the porter with his first call for dinner, and I want you young people to be my guests."

The next morning early Adele and Jack were up and dressed, and after breakfasting in the diner, which was still an enjoyable novelty to the country girl, they returned to their Pullman. Mr. Moore was waiting for them, and, rising, he exclaimed genially, "Wide awake and ready for some new adventure, I see! What do you suppose we acquired in the night?"

"We never could guess, Mr. Moore," Adele replied, "so please do tell us."

"I'll do better than that," the Westerner



exclaimed. "I'll show you, if you will follow me."

Eagerly the boy and girl followed their guide through one car and then another. As they swung around a curve, Adele clutched Jack's arm. "I never dreamed we were on such a long train," she exclaimed.

"I think it grew longer in the night," Jack replied.

"Here we are," Mr. Moore announced, as he opened the door of the last car, which was unoccupied at that early hour.

"Oh! oh!" Adele exclaimed in delight. "Isn't this pleasant! It's almost all glass, and what cosy, comfortable chairs. And look! Here is a writing-desk. If the train didn't shake so, I would love to write a letter to the Sunnyside girls."

"You'll have time enough for that later, for the conductor tells me that he has received orders to sidetrack this afternoon and permit a special to pass. But come, let us sit outside on the observation platform," Mr. Moore said, leading the way. "It is



especially pleasant out here in the morning."

"Oh, Jackie, isn't this luxurious!" Adele remarked, as they were seated in the comfortable wicker chairs. "I never dreamed that traveling was so interesting."

Thus pleasantly the morning passed, and at noon Adele was surprised to learn that they had lost their diner and that they were to have lunch at a wayside station. Seated on a stool at a circular lunch-counter, on which at intervals were plates of pie and doughnuts and ham sandwiches, while neat-looking maids were deftly and swiftly serving steaming coffee in thick cups, Adele watched with interest all that went on.

Early in the afternoon they reached the place where they were to wait on a siding for the special to pass, and Adele skipped to the writing-desk and began her letter.

*"Somewhere in Colorado.*

"MY DEARLY BELOVED SUNNY SIX:

"So much has happened since I saw you last that I hardly know where to begin.



Well, in the first place, Eva's Uncle Dick was unable to meet us in Chicago, and we were wondering what we would better do, when we happened to make the acquaintance of such a nice man, Mr. Moore, who lives at Silver Creek, on a neighboring ranch. He said Mr. Dearman was a particular friend of his, and that he would gladly be our escort. We like him so much, and he tells us about the points of interest. When we were crossing the flat prairies and there was nothing much to look at, Mr. Moore told us tales of his early life in Arizona, when there were Indian raids and hold-ups. Those were certainly exciting days! Jack kept wishing that he and Bob had been in the West at that time, but I said I was thankful that the days of hold-ups were over.

"Well, a little while ago we were passing through a narrow mountain canyon. The bare stone walls on both sides of us rose so sheer and high that we could not see the tops of them from the car-window.

" 'This used to be a favorite place for hold-ups,' Mr. Moore had just said, when our train came to a stop so suddenly that I was almost thrown from my seat. Mr. Moore lifted the window and looked out.

" 'What is it?' I asked eagerly. 'A hold-up?'

"I asked that only in fun, and imagine my surprise when Mr. Moore replied, 'You



are right, Adele; that is just what it is. A masked horseman is holding up the engineer, and two others are boarding the train. Quick, put your bags under the seat!’

“But when one of the masked men entered our car, a pistol in each hand, he said nothing about money, but his keen black eyes were peering through the holes in his mask as though he was searching for some one. There was no one ahead of us, and suddenly his gaze settled on me. Striding forward, he asked, ‘Are you Coraletta, the daughter of a cattle king?’

“‘No! No!’ I replied in terror, as I clung to Mr. Moore’s arm, ‘I am only Adele Doring.’

“‘Aha! I see her now!’ the masked man muttered, and turning, I saw him approach a beautiful Spanish girl, who had been cowering down in her seat as though she had been trying to hide. Lifting her, he carried her out of the car, and I saw him leap with her to his saddle and gallop away. The other two masked horsemen followed, firing shots into the air. Then suddenly I realized that our train was again under way.

“‘Oh, Mr. Moore!’ I cried, ‘why did you and Jack let such a dreadful man carry off that beautiful girl?’

“‘Della,’ Jack exclaimed in surprise, ‘didn’t you know that it was only moving



pictures? Didn't you see the camera out in the vestibule? It was Bill Hart and his company!'

"Girls, wasn't that a joke on me? Often, when we seven have been down to the Little Theater, I have said what fun it would be to take part in a moving picture, and there I was in one and didn't even know it. Mr. Moore said that I did my part very well indeed, for I surely looked scared enough, if that was what they wanted.

"I have ever and ever so much to tell you, but the train has started again, and it shakes my pen so that my writing won't be readable. One day more and we shall reach Arizona and dear Eva. I'll write you a long, long letter just as soon as I am settled.

"Love to all, from

"ADELE.

"P. S.—Bob! Please do try to think up some way to bring all of the girls out to the desert while Jack and I are there.

"A. D."



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### WAITING FOR THE TRAIN

WHILE Adele and Jack were speeding westward on the Sunset Limited, Eva and Amanda on Bar X Ranch eagerly awaited their coming. Mr. Dearman, who had been unable to make the eastern trip as he had planned, was feeling rather anxious about the young travelers. What if Adele and Jack had been lost in Chicago? He had been very sure that they would telegraph a reply to his message, but none had come.

He was sitting on the front veranda of the ranch house, smoking his after-breakfast cigar and thinking of these things, when Eva and Amanda appeared in the doorway. Dancing over to her uncle, Eva kissed him lightly on the forehead, as she exclaimed eagerly, "Oh, Uncle Dick! Just think of it! Adele Doring is really, truly coming



to-day. I'm so happy, so happy! But it does seem as though I never can wait for that slow train to come in. Here it is only nine in the morning and the train isn't due at Silver Creek until five this afternoon. You told Adele in that last telegram to be sure to have the conductor stop at Silver Creek, didn't you?"

Her uncle smiled at her eagerness as he replied, "Yes, Eva mine. I gave Adele and Jack full directions in the telegram that I sent yesterday, to be given to them at El Paso. The train waits there for about an hour, and they will have time to send me a return wire. I am rather expecting to see a horseman appear at any moment, bringing us a telegram."

Eva shaded her eyes and looked up the mesa trail, but all she could see was the gleaming white sand, with here and there a mesquite bush or a weird-shaped cactus, patches of wiry grass, and bits of flaming color, where desert flowers blossomed.

"There is no one in sight," she declared,



as she turned back. Then, catching her friend by the hand, she said, "Let's gather a fresh bouquet of those scarlet flowers, Mandy. If we keep busy, the time will pass more quickly."

An hour later they again went out on the veranda to look for a possible messenger. Mr. Dearman had gone down to the corral.

Suddenly Eva seized her friend's arm, as she exclaimed, "Look, Mandy! Do you see a sand-cloud appearing on the mesa?"

"Yes, I do," the other replied; "but I think that it is merely a whirlwind. You know there is one or more every day now."

"That's right," Eva agreed; "but this cloud of sand doesn't whirl, and it is coming rapidly this way. Oh, Mandy, I can see a dark object in it now. Surely it is a horseman, and he is galloping at top speed." Then, running toward the corral where Mr. Dearman was busily engaged, Eva shouted, "Uncle Dick! Come quick! A horseman is coming and he may have that telegram."



Mr. Dearman, eager for news from Adele and Jack, hurried to the ranch house and arrived there just as Danny Wells, the station agent's son, leaped from his horse.

"Howdy," the boy said, as he produced a yellow envelope. "Pa sent me over with this."

Mr. Dearman, tearing open the envelope, read aloud: "Adele and Jack are on the Sunset Limited. Will arrive at Silver Creek at 5 P. M."

A startled expression appeared in the boy's eyes.

"What's that, Mr. Dearman?" he interrupted. "Was you expecting folks on the Limited?"

"Yes! Yes!" Mr. Dearman replied, troubled by the boy's expression. "Why, Danny, what is it? What has happened?"

"Well, they won't get here at five," the boy replied. "Pa just had a wire from El Paso. The Sunset Limited has been wrecked somehow. We don't know much about it



yet. There were some folks hurt, but they didn't say who. Anyhow none of them passengers will get here to-night."

"Oh, Uncle Dick," Eva sobbed as she flung her arms about Mr. Dearman's neck. "My darling Adele was on that train. If she was hurt, what shall we do?"

Before her uncle could say a word of hope or comfort, Danny Wells exclaimed excitedly as he pointed toward the sky: "Mr. Dearman, do look there. Did you ever see such a big bird?"

Mr. Dearman, shading his eyes, looked up, and far away, in the cloudless and gleaming blue, he beheld something that the desert boy had not seen before—an airplane.

"That must be the Curtiss biplane that the Thirteenth Regiment has been expecting to have sent to them at Douglas; but if it is, I cannot understand why it is bearing this way, instead of to the south."

At tremendous speed the aircraft was approaching and descending, until its entire outline could be distinctly seen, and the



humming noise that it made became momentarily louder.

"There are several people abroad the plane, I should say," Mr. Dearman continued. Then he added, "There must be something wrong with the machinery, for it certainly looks as though it was about to descend near here."

The four, gazing in wonder and amazement, saw the machine suddenly dip and alight on a hard, smooth stretch of sand near the corral.

Thither the four watchers ran, and reached the place just as the craft came to a standstill.

With a cry of astonishment and joy, Eva ran forward with arms outstretched. "Adele! Adele!" she laughed and sobbed as she embraced the girl, who had just been lifted from the plane.

"Well, of all strange things! Daniel Moore, how do you happen to be in an aircraft with Jack and Adele? But don't explain here!" Mr. Dearman continued. "I





EVA RAN FORWARD WITH ARMS OUTSTRETCHED. — *Page 124.*







know you are all as hungry as Russian wolves in midwinter. Come right up to the house and Señora Gabriella will have dinner ready in no time."

"I really cannot stop, thank you, Mr. Dearman," the aviator, Captain Nelson, declared. "I am due even now at the camp over at Douglas."

"If you desire a passenger, Captain," Mr. Moore said, "I will ride along with you and look after our baggage. Have no fear for your trunk, Miss Adele. I will have it sent out with mine in a day or two."

"Thank you, Mr. Moore," Adele replied. And then, turning to the young aviator, she exclaimed, "Oh, Captain Nelson, I shall never, never forget my first ride in the air. I have often wondered how it would feel to be a bird, and now I know. Thank you so much."

"I am glad that the ride gave you so much pleasure, Miss Adele," the young captain replied, with a frank, pleasant smile; "and if Mr. Dearman will postpone the



invitation to dine, I will fly over some day soon and accept it."

"Come any time, Captain," Mr. Dearman exclaimed heartily, "and bring some of the boys with you. You know there is always a big pot of frijoles in a ranch kitchen, if there is nothing else."

The starting of the machinery drowned the merry good-bys, but Captain Nelson and Mr. Moore waved their caps as they soared upward. The others stood watching the craft until it had disappeared, and then Eva hugged Adele once more.

"Is it you, really, truly, Della?" she exclaimed. "Everything has happened so strangely to-day that I am wondering if I am asleep or awake. Wouldn't it be dreadful if I should find it was only a dream and you weren't here at all."

"But it isn't a dream," Adele cried happily. "I'm really, truly here."

"And so am I, Mademoiselle Eva," Jack declared, "although as yet you have not deigned to notice me."



“ Oh, how dreadful of me ! ” Eva said contritely, as she held out her hand to the tall, good-looking boy. “ Of course I am glad that you have come, too. Aren’t we, Mandy ? ” she added, turning and slipping an arm around her adopted sister’s waist. She did not want Amanda to feel left out.

“ Forward ! March ! ” Uncle Dick called, and the merry party proceeded from the corral to the ranch house. Adele gazed about her in delight.

“ Oh, Eva ! ” she said. “ The desert is just as wonderful as I knew it would be from your letters. I know I am going to love it.”



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### NEW ACQUAINTANCES

ADELE was as delighted with the ranch house as Eva could wish.

"See!" the little hostess said as she opened a door. "You are to room with me, Della, and Mandy is right next to us. Now, you will want to wash, I know, though I don't suppose one gets very dusty traveling through the air."

"No, not unless it is star dust," Adele laughingly replied. "But, truth to tell, Eva, I feel as though I would have to soak for days to be free from the alkali dust which covered me when we crossed the desert; but I'll be content to take off the top layer of it just now, for I am powerfully hungry."

A few moments later they were all out in



the veranda dining-room overlooking the water-hole.

"Oh, how pretty!" Adele declared. "Jack, did you suppose that there were such green places on the desert?"

"Yes, sister mine," Jack said, "I have often read of an oasis. What have you named it, Eva? Pequeno Lago?"

"Why, Jack Doring," Adele exclaimed, whirling around to face her brother, "I didn't know you knew a word of Spanish."

"Well, I don't know many words, I shall have to confess," Jack laughingly replied, "but when I heard that we were to come to Arizona, I began studying Spanish in school. My pronunciation may be all wrong. Perhaps no one knows what I mean by Pequeno Lago."

"You say it quite correctly," Mr. Dearman declared as he placed a kindly hand on the boy's shoulder. "Little Lake will be a good name for your duck pond, Eva," he added with a smile at the tall, slim girl



who was as dear to him as an own daughter could be.

“Goody!” she exclaimed. “I’ve often wondered what we would name our precious bit of water. Pequeno Lago—Little Lake. Now, Adele, see if you can say it.”

Poor Adele tried, but languages were hard for her, and the result was so funny that they were all laughing gayly when two cow-boys appeared upon the veranda. Their shining faces and sleek wet hair told plainly of a recent immersion in a big tin basin of water at the kitchen door.

“Oh, here you are, boys!” Uncle Dick said pleasantly. “You’re just in time to share the first Mexican meal with Señorita Adele and her brother, Jack. Jack is a tenderfoot now, as you were last year, Donald, but it’s up to you boys to toughen him into a leather-brown cow-puncher like yourselves. Adele, these young men are known in these parts as Donald Dare and Rusty Pete.”

Jack sprang forward and gave each of the



boys a gripping handclasp. He realized that Donald Dare had been brought up amid surroundings similar to his own, but that Rusty Pete was a typical cowboy. He knew at once that he should like them both.

"Everybody be seated!" Uncle Dick exclaimed, and then, turning to the newcomers, he asked, "What's the news?" Then, by way of explanation, he said to Jack, "Donald and Pete have been riding the range for several days, and this is the first time that I have seen them since they returned."

"Wall," Rusty Pete replied in his slow drawl, "we didn't see nuthin' wrong. By heck!" he added suddenly, "I dunno but maybe we did, though. We was in a hurry to git home and so we didn't stop to look into it. About an hour ago, as we was riding up the mesa trail, Donald happened to look over toward the sand-hill, and he says to me, 'Rusty, am I a-seein' things, or is that there a red flag flyin' from the top of a yucca?' I looked, and I said, 'By heck,



Donald, that sure is something red. Maybe it was blown up there by a whirlwind and got hooked to the yucca.' But, the more I think of it, the more I conclude maybe there is somebody up there that's in trouble and flying a red handkerchief to see if they can get help."

Mr. Dearman looked puzzled. "It is queer," he said, "and after dinner perhaps we would better ride back to the sand-hills and investigate the matter. It surely is a desolate spot for any one to be stranded, whatever the reason."

Then, noting an anxious expression on the girls' faces, he changed the subject and led Adele and Jack to talk of the wreck, which, after all, had been merely the derailment of two of the cars. Mr. Dearman was glad to hear that there had been no fatalities, and that Danny Wells had been misinformed.

When at last the meal was over, Mr. Dearman arose and suggested that the men of the party ride over to the sand-hills and see if the red flag was still flying.



“Oh, Uncle Dick,” Eva pleaded, “can’t we girls go, too? It is only noon, and surely there is nothing that can hurt us.” Mr. Dearman gave his consent, and soon they were all in the saddle, riding toward the desolate sand-hills. They were indeed startled by what they found there.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE MYSTERIOUS RED FLAG

AFTER riding across a desert trail for half an hour, Eva exclaimed, "There, now we can see the sand-hills." About a mile ahead of them were what seemed to be three hills, but, in reality, it was one great hill of sand with three undulations. On it, like sentinels, stood occasional stalks of yucca. Nothing else grew there. Adele shuddered. "I never saw such a lonesome-looking place," she said.

"It is a lonesome place, and a dangerous one, too," Mr. Dearman declared, "for at times there are sand-slides that bury any creature that is near."

The desolate appearance of the hills increased as the riders approached. Suddenly Rusty Pete drew rein as he called back over



his shoulder, "It sure is queer. A minute ago I saw that red flag flying plain as could be, but, by heck, it isn't there now."

"That is strange," Mr. Dearman replied. "It couldn't have blown down, for there isn't a breath of wind stirring."

"Do you suppose there may be Indians in hiding, who are trying to lead us into a trap?" Jack inquired, almost hoping that it might be that, or something equally exciting.

Mr. Dearman smiled. "No, my boy," he replied. "Years ago your surmise might have been correct, but the Indians living on the desert now are all friendly."

As they neared the hill, Uncle Dick drew rein and said, "Girls, I want you to stay here. It is not safe for you to go nearer, for there might be a sand-slide. Jack, will you remain with the girls and hold our horses?" Then, noting the disappointment plainly depicted on the boy's face, he added, "No, you come with me, Jack, and Rusty Pete may remain with the girls."



Rusty Pete, whose nineteen years had been spent on the desert, was not yearning for adventure, as was Tenderfoot Jack, and so he gladly consented to remain.

Starting on foot, Mr. Dearman, Donald and Jack began to climb the side of the hill that was nearest. It was hard to get a foothold, for the sand was loose and they often slid back, while small stones rattled down.

Suddenly the girls, watching almost breathlessly from below, saw one of them pick up something red.

Mr. Dearman held out his hand for it. "Why, Donald," he exclaimed in surprise, "this isn't a man's handkerchief. It's silk, —the sort a girl wears around her throat."

"Well, of all strange things!" the cowboy declared. "I know whose it is. It belongs to Tom Slater's daughter. Her father gave it to her for a birthday present. See! Here is her initial in the corner."

Mr. Dearman looked more puzzled than ever. "But what in the world would Elsie



Slater's handkerchief be doing on the top of this desolate sand-hill?" he inquired.

"I do not know," Donald replied. "But I am sure that Elsie herself is nowhere about, for from the top here we can plainly see the entire surrounding country."

"It's the queerest thing I ever heard of," Rusty Pete declared, when the others, having descended the hill, explained to the waiting group about their find.

"The mystery is still as deep and dark as it was," Mr. Dearman said, "but at least we know who owns the red silk handkerchief," he added, "for Elsie Slater showed it to Donald Dare only yesterday and said that it was one of her birthday gifts."

"Oh, Uncle Dick," Eva cried joyfully, "has Elsie Slater returned from school? I knew that Mr. Slater was expecting her soon, but I did not know she had arrived." Then, turning to Adele, she explained: "I haven't met Elsie as yet myself. She has been in California all winter in some boarding school, but I am just ever so eager to



meet her. I have heard so much about her. The cowboys seem to just adore her; in fact, so does every one on the desert."

"Oh, I know about her," Adele said brightly, as she and Eva and Mandy rode slowly toward the ranch house, the men having ridden toward the valley pasture to look at the fences.

Eva was surprised. "Why, Adele, where did you hear of Elsie Slater?" she asked. And then, before Adele could reply, she added, "Oh, I know. I forgot that you traveled west with Daniel Moore, and he is a sort of adopted uncle of Elsie's; that is, he is a partner of her father's. What did he tell you about her?"

"Well," Adele replied, "Mr. Moore thinks that Elsie is a wonderful girl. It seems that her father had wanted a boy, and Mr. Moore said that Elsie seemed to feel that her dad was disappointed, so she is both a son and a daughter to him. In the house she is as pretty and ladylike as any girl could be, and no one can excel her in cooking; but when



she has on her cowgirl togs and is astride her horse, she can throw a rope or drive a bunch of cattle as well as a boy. Mr. Moore said she is the pride and joy of her father's heart."

"I am so glad that she has come home for the summer," Eva said. "You see, the Slaters are our nearest neighbors."

Adele, who was used to a neighbor living so near that they could converse without leaving their respective doorsteps, looked over the wide, lonely desert in amazement.

"Why, Eva," she said, "how can they be neighbors? I don't see a house anywhere in sight."

Eva laughed merrily. "Oh, Double Bar Ranch isn't in sight from here," she replied. "In fact, the house is hidden by the Bald Mountains. It is about eleven miles to the south, and only one mile from the Mexican border."

"How I do hope we shall meet this wonderful desert girl soon," Adele said. "Then,



perhaps, she can explain for us the mystery of the red silk handkerchief."

That mystery was to be solved much sooner than they dreamed.



## CHAPTER TWENTY

### THE MYSTERY SOLVED

THAT night, after the lights had been turned out, Adele remained awake for a long time, looking out of the open window near her bed. The deep blue sky was studded with jewel-like stars that seemed brighter and nearer than they had been in the East. After a time Eva whispered, "Aren't you asleep yet, Adele?"

"No," the other replied. "I think it is the silence that keeps me awake. I almost wish there was a clock in the room. It seems uncanny to have it so still."

"You'll get used to it and like it after a time," Eva said.

At last, weary from the varied excitements of the day, Adele fell asleep, to be awakened suddenly by a low, dismal howl,



that startled her. She sat up in bed and asked fearfully, "Eva, what was that? It sounded like a wolf."

"Oh, Adele," her friend said contritely, "I forgot to tell you about coyotes. I remember how they frightened me the first night I was on the desert, but now I rather like their mournful cry. They are wolf-like, but they are cowards and seldom come near the house. They do not attack people, so you need have no fear of them."

Thus reassured, Adele sank into a restful slumber and did not again awaken until she heard the quacking of the ducks on "Pequeno Lago," Little Lake. When she opened her eyes, she found that Eva was up and dressing, and a happy song drifting in from the room adjoining assured her that Mandy was up also.

"Top o' the morning to you both," Adele called, as she sprang out of bed. "Oh, isn't it shiny and nice, and aren't we going to have a be-au-ti-ful time to-day!"

"Of course we are," Eva said. "Mandy



and I have the happiest times every day. Don't we, sister dear? "

"Indeed we do," Mandy replied, as, with completed toilet, she appeared in the connecting doorway. Eva tenderly kissed her adopted sister. Not for one minute did she want her to feel that she was being left out, now that Adele had come.

Soon after, arm in arm, they sauntered to the veranda dining-room, to find that Mr. Dearman and the boys had breakfasted hours before and had gone to the valley pasture to start the day's work.

After the three girls had breakfasted, they entered the big living-room, and Eva danced over to a closet and brought forth two brooms and several dusters, as she exclaimed, "Mandy and I tidy up every morning. Señora Gabriella and Bonita have so much to do with the laundry and cooking and dish-washing that we are glad to do the tidying and bed-making for our share."

"'Redding up,' as old Mrs. Quigly used



to say," Mandy exclaimed. Then, taking one of the brooms, she started to sweep off the wide verandas.

Half an hour later Adele and Eva were making a bed when Mandy rushed in and excitedly called out, "Somebody's coming on horseback, and it looks like a girl. What if it should be that Elsie Slater?"

"Oh, how I do hope it is," Eva said, as she darted about, putting away the brooms and dusters and hastily peering in a mirror, to be sure that her hair was tidy.

Then the three went out on the front porch just as a slim, pretty girl in a khaki riding-habit galloped up on a graceful brown horse. Dismounting, she stepped forward with outstretched hand as she exclaimed: "I am Elsie Slater from Double Bar Ranch. When Uncle Tim told me last night that there were two girls about my own age on Bax X, I could hardly wait until morning dawned to come and call on you. I've been away at boarding-school this winter, where there were a hundred and twenty girls of all



ages, and I just expected to be ever so lonesome when I got back to the desert, where there were no girls at all. So you can easily guess how glad I was to hear that there were two, but Uncle Tim was wrong, for there are three of you, I see."

Elsie at last stopped for breath, and Eva exclaimed, "Oh, Miss Slater, I've been so eager to have you come home. I am Eva, Mr. Dearman's niece. You know my Uncle Dick, I am sure. And this is Amanda Brown, my adopted sister; we both live here. And this young lady is Adele Doring, who has come from the far East to spend the summer. Now let us turn your horse into the corral and then we can have a nice visit. You have come to stay all day, haven't you?"

"If you want me that long," Elsie replied happily.

Half an hour later the four girls returned from the corral, whither they had taken the horse, and they were chatting like old friends. Suddenly Adele thought of some-



thing. "Miss Elsie," she exclaimed, "have you lost a red silk handkerchief?"

Elsie's eyes stared in astonishment. "But how did you know that I had lost it?" she inquired in amazement.

"Donald Dare found it on the top of the sand-hills," Eva explained. "He said that you had shown it to him the day before, when he and Rusty Pete were out riding the range."

"Well, of all strange things," Elsie declared. "Yesterday morning, when your uncle's two cowboys were leaving our ranch, I stood in front of the house, waving to them, and suddenly one of those gusty whirlwinds came along and snatched that red silk handkerchief right out of my hand and whirled it away across the desert. I was sorry to lose it, and I certainly never expected to see it again."

"So the mystery is explained," Eva said. Then, as they had reached the ranch house, she added, "It's getting so warm, let us go indoors and make some lemonade." They



found the kitchen deserted, for Señora Gabriella and Bonita, having left it in perfect order, had gone down to their own little adobe house near the creek.

While the girls were rolling the lemons, Mandy said, "Della, what do you think of Donald Dare? Isn't he the handsomest boy that you ever saw?"

"He is indeed good-looking," Adele replied, "and, oh, Eva, weren't you delighted when you heard that he was Miss Grackle's nephew?" Then, before Eva could reply, Adele was saying, "I like Rusty Pete, too. He has such a clear, honest expression."

"Uncle thinks very highly of him," Eva said.

"Rusty hasn't had a chance to be educated, the way the other boys have," Mandy said earnestly, "but I have often talked with him, and his ideas are just as high and fine as Jack's or Donald's. You know I feel so grateful to Rusty Pete, Adele, because he saved my life."



And so, visiting, the girls prepared the lemonade.

Meanwhile Jack was being initiated into the cowboy life. It seemed to this Eastern lad, as he rode astride a lively little cow pony and breathed the fresh morning air, that now, for the very first time in his fifteen years, he was really living. If his Giant Father could have seen the boy then, alert in every muscle, he would hardly have recognized him as his son. At home he was teased because he was unwilling to do anything that required effort.

Donald Dare and Jack, having ridden ahead of the others, were alone for a time in the lower pasture, where many young steers roamed about, restlessly chafing at the unusual confinement. They were soon to be driven to the corral, and from there, on the following day, they would be taken to Silver Creek Junction, to be shipped East. "Say, Donald," Jack began, "while we are waiting for the others to come, couldn't you give me



a lesson in roping? Isn't there a stump or something in the pasture that I could practise on?"

"Stump nothing!" Donald replied. "You might become an expert at roping a stump, but that would never help you to rope a lively steer. Here comes a young one now," he added. "You might practise on him, but don't use that new rope of yours. It's too stiff and hard. An old rope is better. Here, take this soft one of mine."

For the next half hour Jack practised throwing the noose, and at the end of that time he decided that it was not as easy as it looked, for his rope went wild each time, and the young steer, kicking up his heels, seemed to be laughing at him.

"Do you want to give up?" Donald asked.

"No sir-ee, not I," Jack replied; and then, gathering in his rope again, he took careful aim, and, to his own great surprise, he landed his steer. How he wished Bob Angel might see him then.

"Bravo!" he heard a merry voice call



from behind, and turning, he saw Mr. Dearman and Pete riding in at the gate.

A busy hour followed, and the twenty young steers that had been cut out were driven to the corral. Then, unexpectedly, something happened that quite covered Tenderfoot Jack with glory.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### JACK DORING : COWBOY !

THE four girls, having gone back to the ranch house and made lemonade, searched about the kitchen for the hiding-place of a certain delicious little cookie, of which Señora Gabriella always had a bountiful supply. This found, a plate was heaped up and they all went out on the side of the veranda nearest the little lake to enjoy their repast.

When the last drop and the last crumb had disappeared, Eva said, "Hark! What's all the commotion down near the corral?"

"Your Uncle Dick has been bunching some young steers to sell, I guess," Elsie Slater remarked.

"Oh, how I'd love to see Jack playing cowboy," Adele exclaimed gleefully.



“ Couldn’t we run down to the corral and watch them? ”

“ Yes, and let’s take some lemonade,” Eva added.

The girls were nearing the heavily fenced enclosure just as the last young steer was being driven in. Standing in a row, they leaned on the top rail and watched what was happening.

“ Jack, fasten the gate now,” Mr. Dearman was calling; “ and look out for that steer right next to you. He’s acting wild.”

Even as Mr. Dearman spoke, Tenderfoot Jack heard a snort back of him and felt hot breath on his neck. He leaped to one side just as the young steer made a lunge. The gate, not yet fastened, crashed open under the creature’s weight and away he ran. Mr. Dearman leaped to the gate and fastened it, fearing a stampede, for several of the young steers near by were pawing the ground and bellowing. The four girls fairly held their breath. What would happen next?

The cowboys rode among the cattle, speak-



ing quietly, and soon some went to the haystack to feed, others to the water-trough at the foot of the great windmill, and the danger was over.

“Well,” Elsie Slater exclaimed, “if those steers had known their power, they could have crashed down the fences and been free for a short time at least.”

Meanwhile the one steer that had escaped was being pursued by the four riders. Donald and Pete headed it off and turned it back. Then the three cowmen began throwing their ropes. To Jack’s surprise the young steer managed each time to evade the noose. He had his own rope ready to throw, not intending to use it, but suddenly the steer made a lunge in his direction. Standing in his stirrups, Jack hurled his rope, and, to his amazement, in another second he had the mad animal plunging and snorting at the other end of it. Then for one moment he was in real danger, for the steer turned, and, with lowered head, charged at the horse and rider. Like a snake an-



other rope whirled through the air and twined around the young steer's front legs, bringing him to the ground with a crash.

When at last the animal was securely fastened in a small enclosure, Donald Dare rode up to Jack, and, holding out his hand, he cried admiringly, "Tenderfoot no longer! You're the real article, all right. You roped that wild steer as if you'd been a cow-puncher all your life."

Jack laughed. "Thanks," he replied. "But if it hadn't been for you, throwing the animal just when you did, what would have happened to me?"

"You are right, my boy," Mr. Dearman said as he rode up. "You did good roping, all right, but Donald Dare certainly saved your life."

Then, for the first time, the men saw the girls coming around the corral, Eva and Amanda carrying a pail between them.

Adele's heart had almost stopped beating when she had seen her brother in danger, but now that it was all over she and the



other girls wisely decided to say nothing about it at that time.

"Lemonade here!" Eva shouted gayly in a vender's tone of voice. "Who would like a drink of lemonade?"

"We all would, I am sure of that," Mr. Dearman declared, and then the pail went the rounds, returning to the girls quite empty.

"There's an auto coming over the mesa," Jack announced. "Who do you suppose is in it?"

A cloud of dust confirmed Jack's announcement, and a moment later they plainly saw that it was a truck from town. Daniel Moore was on the seat with the driver, and behind him were two trunks.

"And they weren't smashed nor even scratched, for that matter," Mr. Moore declared when the greetings were over.

"I'm glad to hear it," Jack said with a laugh. "That is Adele's first trunk, and she is as choice of it as though it were a gold nugget."



“Did you bring a party dress?” Eva asked a few moments later, when Elsie, Amanda, and Eva were seated on the edge of the bed, watching Adele open her trunk.

“Yes,” that maiden replied, “I did, but, of course, I won’t have any use for it, because how could one have a party here on the desert?”

Eva and Amanda smiled at each other in a manner that would have aroused Adele’s suspicions had she seen it, but she did not, for she was bending over the open trunk.

Elsie, not being in the secret, exclaimed: “A party? Of course we could have a party. Why, last year ——” But, catching Eva’s warning glance, Elsie stopped speaking, wondering why she was not to tell about a party that she attended last year at the schoolhouse.

“Well, here’s my dress, anyway,” Adele announced, lifting from a tray her most treasured gown. It was a white lawn, with little rosebuds scattered all over it, while a



pink sash tied with a big butterfly bow adorned the back. "Adorable Mother gave it to me to wear to my birthday party the fifth of May," she said. "I brought it along because I didn't quite understand how it is on the desert. Honestly, I didn't suppose there was any place in our country where people lived so far away from neighbors. Why, if we wanted to give a party, there wouldn't be any one to invite except coyotes and jack-rabbits and—and ——"

"Burros," Mandy suggested, as two of those little creatures at that moment brayed outside of the window.

Eva had managed to whisper something into Elsie's ear, and when Adele was again deep in her trunk, that pretty girl, with shining eyes, noiselessly clapped her hands, and with her lips silently formed the words, "Oh, won't that be fun?"

Adele, happening to look up a second later, and seeing the three beaming faces, caught hold of Eva and cried merrily, "Girls, I feel in my bones that you have a



secret and that you are leaving me out of it."

Eva, springing up, danced Adele around the room as she replied gayly, "Your bones are very poor prophets, Della, if they think that we would leave you out of anything."

Luckily for the secret, Mr. Moore was just then heard to call: "Ho, Elsie. Are you going back to Double Bar this morning, or are you spending the day at Bar X?"

The four girls ran out to the veranda. The truck had returned to town, and Mr. Moore, astride a horse that he had borrowed from Uncle Dick, was about to start for his home ranch.

"Oh, Uncle Daniel," Elsie cried, "I don't want to go home yet. I would like to stay all day."

"Why don't you stay a week, Miss Elsie?" Uncle Dick suggested.

"Oh, goody," Eva cried. "How I do wish that you could! Mr. Moore, don't you think that Elsie might stay a week with us?"

"She may stay until after the par ——"



Mr. Moore began, but he did not finish the sentence, for his restive horse suddenly decided that it had been standing long enough and started away at a lively pace.

“That is the hardest secret to keep that I ever had,” Eva confided to Mandy, when they were alone. “If Mr. Moore’s horse hadn’t started away just when it did, Adele would have heard all about it, and I do so want to surprise her.”

Elsie Slater was delighted because she was to make the girls a real visit, and Mandy, who was just about Elsie’s height, offered her a pretty house dress to wear.

“Oh, aren’t we having the best time ever?” Adele exclaimed joyfully.

Such fun as the four girls had that night. They retired early to their rooms, and, undressing, put on their bright-colored kimonos,—Eva had an extra one that she loaned to Elsie,—and then sat on the floor, tailor-wise, in front of the glowing grate fire in Eva’s room. To a delighted audience



Elsie told about her boarding-school life, and, before they knew it, the living-room clock was chiming the hour of ten.

Eva arose. "This never will do," she said, "for we may be up quite late tomorrow night."

"Why?" Adele asked.

What should Eva say? If she told the truth, it would spoil the surprise. Elsie was thinking this also, and so she exclaimed, to change the subject, "Girls, I'm almost asleep this minute. If you have a bed for me, please lead me to it."

Mandy, leaning over, took Elsie's hand, and, pretending to pull her up, she replied, "You are to have the pleasure of sleeping with me, Lady Fair."

Half an hour later all was quiet, save now and then the dismal howling of a distant coyote.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### TRYING TO KEEP A SECRET

THE next morning Eva was up as soon as the ducks began to quack down by Pequeno Lago,—Little Lake. Stealing out, that she might not awaken the other girls, she hunted for her Uncle Dick, whom she found breakfasting.

“Well, Eva mine,” he exclaimed, when they had exchanged a loving greeting, “have you managed to keep Adele from learning your secret?”

“Y-e-s, I think we have so far,” Eva replied, “although she does suspect 'something. But we won't be able to keep her from knowing it much longer, not if she is to stay around here all day, for there are so many preparations to make. I wish she might go away somewhere. I would so love to really surprise her.”



Uncle Dick's face brightened. "Your wish shall be granted," he declared, "that is, if Adele would like to take a ride in the 'iron pony,' for Donald Dare is going into Douglas to-day, to lay in supplies for a month. I was going to suggest that Jack ride in with him, but since there is only room for one passenger coming back, that one would better be Adele. Then she will know nothing of your preparations for this evening."

Eva gave her uncle a bear-hug as she exclaimed: "Oh, you dear! That is a fine scheme. I am almost sure that Della will be delighted to take that ride."

Eva was right, for when Adele heard about it, she was eager to go. "You three girls are used to the desert," she said, "but it is all so new to me that I just can't see enough of it."

Half an hour later Donald drove the "iron pony" around to the front veranda, and, leaping down, he helped Adele to the seat beside him. Then, with a honking of



the horn and a waving of hats and handkerchiefs, the automobile and its occupants disappeared over the mesa. As soon as they were out of sight, Eva whirled around, exclaiming, "I never supposed that the time would come when I should want to get rid of Adele, but it surely came to-day, for I do so want to surprise her to-night. Now, come on, girls; there is so much to do to get ready."

The day passed quickly for the three busy girls, and at five o'clock they began to watch for Adele's return; but the automobile did not appear, and when six o'clock arrived and no Adele, Eva was truly worried.

"I did so want her to be here before any one else came," she said. "I can't see why Donald is so late."

"Here they come now," Mandy cried, and the three joyfully ran out to the porch to meet their friend.

"Why, girls," Adele declared, "you have on pretty white dresses. What does that mean?"



"We thought we would dress up to-night just for fun," Eva said; "and maybe we'll have a candy-pull or something like that and play it is a party."

"Oh, goody!" Adele merrily exclaimed. "And did you invite the coyotes and the jack-rabbits and burros?"

Eva laughed as she led Adele to her room. "Now you wash," she said, "and put on your pretty rosebud dress, and I will help you, for supper is ready and I know you must be hungry."

Adele, all unsuspecting, did as she was told.

As soon as supper was over the three girls returned to the living-room, and Adele, happening to glance out of the window, exclaimed, "Eva, do look. Here comes a big hay-wagon drawn by four horses, and I declare if it isn't filled with people. Where have they come from, and where do you suppose they are going?"

Out to the veranda the four girls went,



and the young driver, who was Danny Wells, the station-master's son, from Silver Creek Junction, urged the four big horses to their top speed, and so they galloped up to the ranch house in grand style.

"Here we all be!" jolly Mr. Wells announced as he climbed over a wheel and then held up his arms to lift down the three little Wells children, who were aged nine, seven, and two. Their freckled faces were shiny-clean, and the black pigtails on the two little girls stood stiffly out at an angle, with a pert red bow tied on the end of each. Eva, after shaking hands with Mr. Wells, introduced him and the children to Adele.

"These are Lizzie and Lottie Wells," she said; "and this little chubby fellow they call Toady. I never have heard his real name, but I suppose that he has one, hasn't he, Mrs. Wells?" the girl inquired, as she turned to greet a pleasant-faced, portly woman who was now approaching.

"Oh, yes," that proud mother replied.



“Toady has a respectable name, but he’s so fat and freckled it doesn’t seem to fit him just now, so we thought we wouldn’t use it until he was growed. You see his granny was living with us when he was born, and when it came to choosing a name, I wanted to call him Algernon, after a nice young man in a book; and his paw wanted to call him Fearless Jake, after a man he liked over at the gulch; but Granny said she’d name him herself, so she opened the Bible and picked out the first name her eyes lit on, and it was Solomon, so that is Toady’s real name.”

This explanation had been addressed to Adele while Eva was welcoming the other newcomers whom she now introduced to her friend.

“Della,” she said, “this is Mrs. Darkus, who used to be a school-teacher at the Junction until she married the handsomest cowboy in southern Arizona; and in this roll of flannel I think you will find Baby Darkus, if you peep.”



“Oh, Mrs. Darkus, may I please, please peep?” Adele implored.

The pretty young mother uncovered the tiny pink face of her first-born, and how Adele yearned to take the little blue-eyed darling in her arms; but Eva was calling her to come and meet Mr. and Mrs. Dickson and the seven Dickson “steps.”

“That’s what we call our young ’uns,” Mrs. Dickson declared. “Four boys and three girls, and all red-headed. ’Most the only difference we can see in them is that each is a head taller than the one next younger.”

Adele, all this while, was secretly wondering where these people had come from, and so she asked, “Do you live here, Mrs. Dickson?”

“Oh, yes, indeed,” that bustling, middle-aged woman replied. “We are real near neighbors,—near enough to borrow a teacup of sugar if need be. We only live eight miles to the southwest of here and four miles from the Junction.”



Adele gasped. It was plain that she would have to change her former ideas about neighbors.

His passengers having all alighted, Danny Wells was starting to drive his foursome down to the corral, when he drew rein and called back over his shoulder, "Sounds like a stampede of wild horses coming this way."

"And so there is," Uncle Dick exclaimed, as he pointed toward the mesa, on which there appeared at least a dozen cowboys, who, as soon as they saw the group on the porch, began to utter wild whoops and fire shots into the air.

Adele clutched Eva's arm. "What are they?" she cried in real alarm.

Eva laughed as she replied, "Why, Della, they are some of the guests who are coming to our party."

"*Party!*" Adele cried with shining eyes. "Oh, now I understand it all. I simply couldn't imagine why these people were stopping here. Jack, think of having guests



come to a party back East, whooping and firing guns like that."

"It's great," Jack exclaimed. "How I do wish that Bob was here to see those cow-boys ride."

The next to arrive was an automobile load of girls, who had come all the way from Douglas. Merry strains of music were heard from within, and then the party began.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### A STRANGE PARTY

*"Bar X Ranch, Silver Creek, Ariz.*

"MY ADORABLE MOTHER AND GIANT DADDY:

"I am so sleepy that I can hardly keep my eyes open, but I have had such an exciting time that I do want to write you all about it, and if I don't do it now, it will be a whole week before I get another chance to mail a letter. You see we don't have post-boxes on the corners here, because there aren't any corners, to begin with, and no postmen to collect the mail.

"Whenever a cowboy happens to be riding the range near town, he takes the mail with him, and then later brings some back for us. I didn't know that it was such fun to watch for mail until I came out here. At home I had most everybody I loved right around me, but now that I am so far away from all of you, I get dreadfully excited when I see Rusty Pete or Donald Dare on the mesa trail with a mail-bag tied to his saddle-horn, for I just know that I am to have some nice, plump letters. I'm going to



send one every week, and you write me one, too.

“Oh, Mumsie, I feel just exactly like a girl living in a Wild West story-book. What do you think? I was up all night and until daybreak this morning. Do you wonder that I am sleepy?”

“Now, if you are all properly curious, I will tell you what I was doing. I was at a cowboys’ party! That is, it was Eva’s party, but there were cowboys at it, dressed in their fringed leather chaps, with red handkerchiefs knotted about their necks; and when they arrived, they came galloping up on their wiry mustangs, whooping and firing their six-shooters into the air. I thought we were all going to be massacred, or that something dreadful was about to happen, but Eva laughingly told me it was only a party. Then a carload of pretty young girls came from Douglas, the desert city that is nearest us, and two fiddlers from somewhere played the jolliest dance music, and how I do wish the girls could have seen those cowboys dance! But most of all I enjoyed the babies! Oh, I see your eyes open wide in surprise. ‘Babies at a cowboys’ party!’ you exclaim. Well, I was just as much surprised myself when I saw whole families arriving; but out here people do not keep nurse-girls, and so where the fathers and mothers go, the youngsters go, too. Mandy



and I had the best kind of a time amusing them until about ten o'clock, when they all fell asleep. Then we laid them in rows on the beds and went out to watch the fun. At midnight supper was served. They called it a barbecue, and there was enough of everything to feed a regiment. After that they danced until dawn, and then the mothers and fathers picked up their sleeping children and carried them away. Next the carload of girls started for the city, the cowboys galloping alongside, whooping and shooting into the air. We four girls were in bed and asleep five minutes later, and we did not wake until noon to-day. I'm not sure that I'm awake even yet, but at any rate I'm sitting up, and trying to write you all about it, because Rusty Pete will start to town with the mail to-morrow morning before we are up.

"Now write me by return post, and tell me if the girls had any picnics or parties since I left. I do hope that you miss me a teeny, weeny bit. I miss all of you so much.

"Your loving daughter,

"ADELE DORING.

"P. S. Elsie Slater, who is a charming girl from a neighboring ranch, is visiting us, but she goes home to-day. A. D.

"P. S. again. Jack just came in with a huge dead rattlesnake hanging over his gun.



He wants you to tell Bob about it. He has killed so many that Donald calls him 'Rattlesnake Jack,' and you can't guess how pleased that brother of mine is. He thinks he is a full-fledged cowboy now. Jack says to tell Bob that he'll write to him on next week's mail. I can hardly wait for tomorrow night, for I am so sure there will be a letter from you all.

"Good-by once more.

"ADELE."



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### ELSIE SLATER'S ADVENTURE

ADELE, having finished writing her letter, dropped it into the mail-bag, which during the week hung near the fireplace, and, as the days passed, bulged more and more with outgoing mail. Then, turning, she saw Elsie Slater dressed once more in her cowgirl togs, and that reminded Adele that their guest was about to leave them. Impulsively catching hold of her hands, she exclaimed, "Oh, Elsie, I am so sorry that you are going so far away. I just love to have you with us."

"And I love to be with all of you," Elsie replied. "But, Adele," she added gayly, "I am not going far away. I just live over one range of mountains ten miles to the south. Eva and I are real near neighbors,



and, what is more," she continued, as the other two girls entered the room, "you are all to come and visit me soon. You will bring them, won't you, Eva?"

"We will be glad to come," Eva replied. Then, turning to Adele, she said, "It's such a beautiful day, suppose we ride a mile or two with our departing guest."

"Oh, good! I wish you would," Elsie exclaimed.

Fifteen minutes later the four girls were on horseback, picking their way over the rocky, dry creek-bottom and up the steep bluff on the other side, where the trail was so narrow that it scarcely seemed as though a horse could get a foothold; but soon they reached the top, and a smooth plateau stretched to the mountains that rose rugged and sheer out of the desert.

"Let's race to yonder giant cactus," Elsie called, as she pointed with her quirt. "One, two, three, *go!*"

Away the four wiry ponies galloped, enjoying the frolic as much as did their young



riders. Elsie, far more used to the saddle than the others, was easily victorious, and Adele gayly adorned the winning pony with a red ribbon bow, torn from her own brown braid.

At the giant cactus they said good-by, and then Elsie rode away, while the other three sat on their ponies, watching until she had entered the mountain pass.

"Is it perfectly safe for Elsie to cross the mountains alone?" Adele asked.

"It must be," Eva replied. "If it wasn't, her father and Uncle Tim would not permit her to ride that way so often."

"Well, she surely is brave," Adele said, and she often looked back at the rugged mountains, wondering if she would ever be so courageous.

Reaching home, the girls retired to their rooms for an afternoon siesta, and when they awakened it was nearing the supper hour. Arm in arm they sauntered to the front porch. They saw Jack galloping up from the valley pasture. He seemed much



excited about something. The girls hailed him.

"What has happened, Jack?" Adele asked.

The boy drew rein as he replied, "Miguel came through the mountain pass this morning, and he told us that he saw a big bear. He thinks it was a mother, with little ones not far away. I wanted to go after it right then, but the pasture-fence was broken and we had to fix it. We three boys are going on a bear-hunt now. Why, what's the matter, Sis? You needn't worry about me. I won't be hurt."

"I was thinking of Elsie Slater," Adele explained. "Oh, Eva, do you suppose she is safely home? She said she would telephone the moment she reached there."

"Maybe she did call," Eva said quietly. "You know we have been asleep, and no one else was in the house all the afternoon. I'll ring up and find out."

A few minutes later Eva returned, looking pale and troubled.



“There was no reply,” she said. “Either the line is out of order or there is no one at home.”

“Do you mean to tell me that Elsie Slater rode alone through the mountain pass where Miguel saw the bear?” Jack inquired.

Eva nodded.

“Then there is not a moment to lose,” the boy said. “We will ride to the pass at once.” He turned and galloped back to the corral, where Donald Dare and Rusty Pete were waiting for him.

Meanwhile, when Elsie bade her three friends good-by at the giant cactus, she galloped away toward the mountain pass, turning now and then to wave to them. She had had such a happy visit, and as she rode up the narrow trail she was living it all over again in her thoughts. Although the sun was shining brightly on the desert, it was like dim twilight in the canyon. The rugged walls of rock rose on either side of her, with here and there a scraggly bush struggling to



grow in an earth-filled crack. It surely was a desolate trail, and Elsie remembered how Adele had shuddered at the thought of a young girl riding through it alone. She could easily understand how an Easterner, unused to the mountains, might be afraid; but she, desert-raised, knew no fear. Years ago it would have been dangerous for even a man to ride through there alone. She had often heard her father and Uncle Tim tell how the Indians would hide behind rocks and boulders and steal out upon unsuspecting travelers; but those days were far in the past. Then, too, in earlier times there had been wild animals in these mountains; but now they were seldom seen, and when they did appear, they were more afraid of the horseman than he was of them. At this point Elsie's thoughts were interrupted by a crashing noise, and a huge boulder plunged down one of the rocky walls and split in a hundred pieces on the trail not far ahead of her. The pony, Whirlwind, not understanding what had happened, reared



and backed, and although Elsie was a good horsewoman, she could not control the frightened animal, and so she thought best to leap to the ground. Then it was that she heard a low growl back of her, and that sound so terrorized the horse that he plunged blindly ahead and left Elsie alone in the mountain pass with some wild creature, she knew not what.

For the first time in her fourteen years, the desert girl was frightened. She drew the small gun that she always carried lest she should encounter a rattlesnake, and then, as quickly as possible, she began to climb to an overhanging rock, that she might have a better view of the pass.

Lying flat on the top of the ledge, she looked down on the trail. Suddenly her heart stopped beating, for she saw the creature that had growled. It was a big brown bear, and with it were three small cubs. It had evidently seen the horse, but Elsie felt sure that it did not know of her near presence. It was standing just be-



neath her hiding-place, watching the galloping horse that was fast disappearing. Now and then it uttered a low, rumbling growl, and the three cubs huddled close to their mother for protection from what danger they knew not. Elsie hardly dared to breathe, for fear the big bear would hear and turn upon her. Her one hope was that Whirlwind would go straight home, and then she well knew that her father or uncle would understand that something had happened and would come in search of her. The watching bear did not move for what seemed to be an endless length of time, and then, when it did, it started to climb the rocks near Elsie's hiding-place. In another moment the girl was sure it would see her, and then —— Her heart stopped beating as she thought of her possible fate.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### MEETING A BEAR

ELSIE, lying flat on the top of an overhanging ledge, scarcely dared to breathe, as she intently watched the big bear slowly lumbering up the rocks below her. She did not shoot, for she well knew that the wound that her gun could inflict would merely infuriate the animal, and that then she would surely be torn to pieces. Her only hope lay in the possibility that the huge creature would pass her by unobserved. She was glad she had on her khaki riding-habit, since it was so much the color of the rocks.

Slowly the bear ascended, and in another moment Elsie would be in full view. Brave as she was, the girl felt that she could lie still no longer. She had a wild desire to leap to her feet and run, but that, she knew,



would destroy even the small chance she had of escape.

The head of the bear appeared for one second on a level with the girl, but suddenly the animal turned and looked back. There had been a frightened cry from one of the cubs. The little bear was so small and round that it had missed its footing, and, like a soft ball, had rolled back to the trail. The big mother-bear growled gently and waited for the little fellow to again try the ascent.

Frightened as she was, Elsie could not but think that the bear was the cutest little fellow she had ever seen. Its whining cry seemed to say, "Mother Bear, come down and help me. I'm not big enough yet to climb such a steep place."

Then the huge bear seemed to grunt an affectionate reply, and, to Elsie's immense relief, it turned and lumbered down to the trail.

For a moment the mother's big shaggy head rested on the little bear, as though



caressing it. Then, with a few short growls that seemed to say, "Come, little ones, we won't try to climb until your legs are stronger," the mother-bear led the young cubs through the pass to another part of the mountains.

When Elsie realized she was safe, she felt like springing up and shouting for joy; but, knowing that this would be unwise, she lay still and waited for the help that she was sure would soon come to her. She was right, for a few moments later she heard shots and the sound of voices hallooing down the trail toward Bar X, and then three horsemen appeared, Jack in the lead.

"Elsie!" he called. "Where are you?"

The girl sprang to her feet. "Here I am, Jack," she replied; and then, as fast as she could, she scrambled down the rocks. When the three cowboys saw her white face and heard the story of her narrow escape from being torn to pieces, they wanted to start at once in search of the bear and kill it. But Elsie said, "Please don't. Somehow I don't





THE HEAD OF THE BEAR APPEARED ON A LEVEL WITH THE GIRL.  
*Page 183.*







want that bear shot. It's a mother-bear, and it loves its little ones I know, and the baby cubs are so cunning."

The boys saw that, brave as Elsie was, she was very much upset by her recent adventure and they decided not to go contrary to her wishes at that time. While they were talking, Tom Slater and his brother, Tim, appeared from the other direction, leading a horse for Elsie. Her father caught his little girl in his arms and held her as though he would never let her go. The three cowboys rode with them over the mountains, looking for old bruin, but the bear, if she saw them, wisely kept in hiding. When the three boys were returning, Jack said, "That's the trouble with girls—they are so tender-hearted; but I suppose, in a way, this bear sort of belongs to Elsie, and we ought not to shoot it if she wants it to live."

"But we can't leave a bear with three young ones at large here, where the girls ride so often alone," Donald declared. "That bear must have come from some other



range. There hasn't been one sighted in these mountains for many years. I'll tell you what. They're starting a zoo over at Douglas. Let's try to catch the creature alive, with her cubs. That would be heaps more sport than just shooting her."

But although the boys returned the next day, the bear was not found. Rusty Pete was of the opinion that the wise old mother-bear had decided that she had wandered too near the haunts of man, and had returned with her little ones to some more distant and less frequented mountain range from which she had evidently come. Elsie Slater secretly rejoiced when she heard the result of the bear hunt, for she dreaded the thought of having her bear penned in a cage, restlessly pacing up and down and longing for the freedom and the wild life of the mountains.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### A LETTER FROM JACK TO BOB

THAT night Jack wrote the long-promised letter to his pal, Bob Angel, who was spending his uneventful vacation in Sunnyside, Jack's Eastern home.

*"Bar X Ranch, Silver Creek, Ariz.*

"HELLO, OLD MAN!

"What are you up to these days? Nothing very exciting, I am sure of that. You're probably riding around in that respectable four-wheeler of yours that never does anything more thrilling than puncture a tire, while I, now a full-fledged cowboy, do marvelous feats, bareback, on a bucking broncho; that is, I was on its back for one-quarter of a second, and then I wasn't. You ought to have been here to see the fun! Say, Bob, do you remember how we used to creep under the tent-flaps to see a circus when we were kids, and how we did admire the Wild West stunts? Well, those were tame compared to what yours truly did yesterday. Pete and Donald were going to 'bust' a



broncho, and of course I wanted to be in on it. It was a wiry, yellowish horse with fiery eyes, and Pete called it 'Sulphur.' It was the first time it had ever had a bit in its mouth, and Rusty Pete had been riding it hard until they thought it was pretty well tired out, so they said that I might take a little canter on it if I wished. I saw there was a twinkle in Donald's eyes, and Rusty whirled on his heel and looked the other way to hide a grin, I was sure of that. They thought I wasn't game, but I made up my mind that I would try to ride that wild broncho if it was the last thing that I ever did, and so I replied, 'Sure! I'll take a turn on him.' But the minute that horse saw me, he snorted and reared and stood high on his hind legs for so long that I didn't know whether or not he ever was coming down again, so that I could mount him. When he was on all fours once more, Rusty Pete drawled, 'Sulphur is kind of particular who rides him, I reckon. He doesn't seem to like your looks, Jack. Guess we'll have to blindfold him and then maybe he'll be quieter.'

"That's what they did, and the broncho was so puzzled that he stood still long enough for me to scramble up on his back. Then when Pete snatched off the bandage, the horse, infuriated by the unfair advantage that we had taken of him, dashed madly



around the corral, and, before I could guess what he was going to do, leaped over the fence, knocking off the top rail. As for me, I went flying through the air and luckily landed on a mound of soft sand; but if I'd gone a foot farther, I would have landed on the prickliest cactus that grows anywhere around.

"I tell you, Bob, this life is cram full of adventure. I wish you'd jump in your four-wheeler and head this way. Mr. Dearman is great. He said he'd be glad to have you come.

"Well, I hear a commotion outside, so I'll end this letter and see what it is.

"Your old pal,

"RATTLESNAKE JACK."

Seizing his sombrero, the lad hurried out and down toward the corral.

It was twilight, but Jack could plainly discern the figures of three men in excited conversation, and, as he neared them, he saw that they were Mr. Dearman, Donald Dare, and Rusty Pete.

"What's up?" Jack called as the three turned toward him.

"That's just what we don't know," Mr. Dearman replied.



"And what we intend to find out this very night, if possible," Donald declared. "I, for one, will gladly go and camp out down there, and see if I can catch the thief."

"Thief!" Jack exclaimed. "What thief, and where is he?"

"I don't wonder that you are puzzled, Jack," Mr. Dearman said, "since you did not hear the beginning of the story. You know last week, when we rounded up the cows with very young calves, there were about forty of them, and we turned them into the lower pasture, thinking that we would not brand them until to-morrow. Well, Rusty was down there this afternoon, to see if there was water enough in the troughs, and as he neared the pasture he heard first one cow bellowing and then another, the way they do when they have lost their young. When he reached the pasture, he soon saw that there were a number of cows alone, and, upon counting them, he found that several calves were missing. You know a calf will not willingly leave its



mother, so the question is, were they dragged away by wild animals or stolen by rustlers?"

"That's the question," Donald Dare repeated. "And now, Jack, are you willing to go with Pete and me and find the answer?"

"'Willing' isn't the word," Jack declared. "Wild horses couldn't keep me from going. When do we start?"

"Instantly," Donald replied. "Rusty and I will wrangle some fresh mounts while you go up to the house, Jack, and get Bonita to fill a basket with grub. I haven't had a thing to eat since sun-up. Bring along your blankets. There's a shack down there where we can cook and sleep. Be as quick as you can. It will be dark before many minutes now, and the thief may be at work before we get there."

Jack, hungering for adventure, was overjoyed that one was so near at hand. "Not that I want Mr. Dearman to be the loser, to be sure," he exclaimed to Adele, who, with Eva and Bonita, were rushing about in the kitchen, filling a basket with "grub," as the



boys called it; "but I was so disappointed when I lost out on that bear. Just think what a thrilling letter I could have written to Bob if only I had lassoed a grizzly, but now, if I capture a rustler, or whoever the thief may be, that will do pretty nearly as well. Good-by, Sis! Now, don't worry about me. I have a charmed life, I guess." And then, with a wave of his sombrero, the boy hurried away toward the corral with the well-filled basket and his blankets.

The three girls stood at the living-room window, watching him go.

"How different boys are," Amanda said. "We would heaps rather sit here by the fire and sew than go on any such wild adventure."

Adele sighed as they turned back to their pleasant tasks, which Jack's hasty advent had so recently interrupted. "I hope brother will not run into needless danger," she said. "I do believe he cares more about having something exciting to tell Bob than he does for the adventure itself."



Eva laughed as she lighted the big, rose-shaded lamp on the magazine-littered table, and, reseating herself, took up a tiny white garment on which she was sewing. Each of the girls was making something for the new Dickson baby at the K-Cross ranch, and they were planning to ride over with their gifts on the following day.

Meanwhile the three cowboys rode silently through the gathering darkness. They hoped to steal upon the pasture unseen by the possible rustlers who might be in hiding among the desolate sand-hills. Even the horses seemed to understand, and made no sound. The sand-hills, weird and deserted-looking in the full light of day, loomed dark and forbidding against the gray western sky.

Beyond, the desert sloped to a depression two miles in extent, where a coarse grass grew luxuriantly during the rainy season. Part of this had been fenced and was called the valley pasture. At the far end a small shack had been erected, and toward this the boys were headed.



Silently Donald Dare swung the gate wide and the others passed through. The cattle seemed to be quiet, and, after fastening the gate, the three boys rode around the outer edge until they reached the shack. Then, turning the horses loose to feed, they entered the shed and closed the door. A lantern hanging on the wall was lighted long enough for the boys to be sure that they were alone. Then they threw their blankets on the floor, and as soon as possible extinguished the light for fear it might be seen, by whom they knew not.

They decided to sleep two at a time, one to be left on guard. Donald and Pete were the first to take to the blankets, while Jack seated himself in the open doorway, his six-shooter on his knees.

An hour passed, and the night settled down unusually dark. Still another hour, and nothing had happened. It would soon be Jack's turn to sleep, and he had so hoped that the thieves would come during his watch. He had risen and was about to



waken Pete when he saw something moving stealthily along on the outside of the fence.

Tiptoeing into the shack, he shook Donald gently, not wishing to arouse him too suddenly, and then whispered, "Quick, get your gun! The thief is coming! It's either a rustler creeping along on hands and knees, or else it's a wild animal."



## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### JACK'S NARROW ESCAPE

DONALD DARE, though at first only half awake, sprang to his feet and seized his gun. Pete, seeming in his sleep to sense the excitement, leaped from his blankets.

"What is it?" he whispered. "What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened yet," Donald replied softly. "Jack thought he saw some one or something creeping along outside of the fence."

"I don't see anything now," Jack said in a disappointed tone, as he peered intently into the darkness. Then he clutched Donald's arm as he pointed with his other hand. "Yes, I do," he whispered. "There it is—a long, dark object standing so still outside of the fence that at first I thought it was a rock."



The three boys stole out and stood close to the front of the shack.

"I think it is a mountain lion," Rusty whispered; "and if 'tis, I'm pretty sure he is the thief that we are after. Have your guns ready, but don't shoot until he comes nearer. If he sees us or hears us, he will bound away."

The animal was standing still, alert. It seemed to sense danger, but could not place it. The boys scarcely breathed as they waited; then suddenly Jack tightened his hold on Donald's arm. The lion was again moving stealthily toward them. How Jack wished that he might be the one to shoot it. He wanted to be able to tell Bob about it. Pete seemed to understand the younger boy's desire, and so, with lips close to his ear, he whispered, "Jack, when the lion passes the next post, take careful aim and shoot. If you miss, Donald and I will fire, for we must get him."

Jack's heart thumped with excitement. With his gun in readiness he waited, and the



moment the dark head appeared beyond the post, he fired. There was an unearthly screech, and the animal bounded away. Donald and Pete shot almost together, but the mountain lion did not stop.

Jack was remorseful. "I was so excited," he declared, "I did not wait as long as you told me to, Pete. I wish I had let you shoot first."

"Never mind, Jack," the older boy said kindly. "We all have to learn. We'll get him yet, even if we have to camp out here for a week. There is one thing sure, he won't be back to-night and so we can all roll up in our blankets and get a good sleep."

The next morning Jack was awake at sun-up. He turned over, but saw only blankets at his side. Then he smelled an odor of frying bacon. Springing up, he went outside and saw Donald and Pete busily preparing breakfast over a fire that was surrounded with rocks, to prevent its spreading in the dry grass.

Jack was hungry, but as soon as he had



eaten he sprang up, exclaiming, "I'm going to take a look at the place where the lion was when I shot at him."

He ran to the fence, and, leaping over, examined the ground. Suddenly he straightened up, and, waving frantically, he called: "Donald! Pete! Come quick. One of us must have hit him, and we can follow his trail easy. See, it leads right over toward the place you call the rock quarry. Shall we follow it now?"

Pete shook his head and looked thoughtful. "I dunno as we ought," he replied. "A mountain lion is coward enough at times, but if we cornered him in his den, there's no telling what kind of a fight he'd put up."

The younger boy looked so disappointed that Pete laughingly added, "Well! Well! Rattlesnake Jack, if your heart is set on the adventure, we will follow the trail over toward the rock quarry."

If Pete had known what was going to happen, it is possible that he would have turned back, but, not knowing, the three



boys kept on following the trail across the glistening sands.

As they neared the place called the rock quarry, they held their guns in readiness to shoot, should they see the mountain lion they were pursuing.

"Looks as if some giant once upon a time had started to build a mountain here out of bowlders and then went away and forgot to finish it," Jack said quietly.

"There are plenty of hiding-places in there," Pete told them. "It's a wise man who gives that heap o' rocks a wide berth, for it's a popular summer resort for rattlers."

The boys walked slowly around the miniature mountain, and searched it with eyes well shaded from the glaring sun.

"I don't hear a sound," Jack said. "I don't believe our lion is there, after all."

Little did Jack know that one of the chief characteristics of a mountain lion is the absolute silence it keeps when it is about to attack, and all this while, on a wide, over-



hanging ledge, the huge, cat-like animal was lying, watching every move the three boys made, and, as they neared its hiding-place, was noiselessly preparing to spring.

Jack, going ahead of the others, was directly in front of the ledge when Rusty Pete's quick eye noted a movement above.

"Run, Jack! Run!" he started to cry. But before he could form the words, the lion had leaped from the rock, and, landing upon Jack's shoulder, had knocked the boy to the ground. With terror in their hearts the two other boys ran to the spot. Then, taking careful aim, that they might not hit Jack, they fired, and the mountain lion, without uttering a sound, rolled over, dead.

"Thanks be!" Rusty Pete exclaimed, as though he were uttering a prayer. "I tell you, Donald Dare, I've lived a hard life and had a lot of scary adventures, but that was the first time I was ever thoroughly frightened."

"But what's the matter with Jack? Why doesn't he get up?" Donald asked anxiously,



as he stooped over the boy, who lay pale and still on the hot sand.

Then, with a new fear for the younger boy whom he had learned to love like a brother, he knelt down beside him and listened to his heart.

"It's beating," he said, looking up at Pete. "He must be stunned by the fall. I'm sure the creature didn't have time to hurt him before we shot. His coat is pretty much torn, though."

Jack slowly opened his eyes and looked puzzled.

"Hello, Donald!" he said. "What's happened?"

Then, as his memory returned, he added: "Oh, I know. We are hunting for a mountain lion. But say, what happened to me? Who knocked me down?"

Donald, just because he was so relieved to find that the younger boy was unhurt, laughed as he replied, "Well, Jack, you are some hunter. Tried to catch the mountain lion in your arms, didn't you? But it's



lucky for you that Pete and I had our guns ready to fire. There she lies yonder, a mother-lion, I judge, and it wouldn't surprise me any if she had some kittens hidden away in the rocks up on that ledge."

"We ought to make sure about it," Pete said; "for if they manage to grow up, they'll be killing calves themselves before long."

Just then Jack happened to look up to the ledge, and he saw three of the cutest baby lions, no larger than kittens, peering over at him, probably wondering where their mother had gone.

"You fellows wait here," Pete exclaimed. "I'm going to catch those little critters and we'll raise 'em for pets."

Half an hour later, with the three lion kittens secured in an Indian basket, covered with a blanket, Donald Dare and Jack rode back to the ranch. Rusty Pete thought it best to remain another night at the shack, to be sure there were no other lions molesting the cattle.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

### QUEER KITTENS

ADELE, Eva, and Amanda had just returned from a canter to the sand-hills, when Eva exclaimed, "Look, girls! Yonder are two horsemen. Do they resemble any one you have ever seen before?"

"Oh, Eva," Adele laughed. "You are trying to talk like the heroine in the book we read last night."

"True," Eva replied gayly. "Didn't the English teacher over at the Dorchester Institute say that was the way to improve? Read good books, and then try to talk like them."

Adele nodded as she replied, "Yonder horsemen approach with haste, as though they were bearing thither an important message."



"It's Jack and Donald Dare," Mandy declared. "What do you suppose they have in the basket? It must be some wild creature. Can't you hear the growling?"

The three girls drew rein and waited. "Why, Jack Doring," Adele exclaimed. "What have you in your basket?"

Jack grinned. "I'll give you three guesses, Sis," he said.

"Well, I should say that you had a whole zoo in there, by the snaps and snarls," Della laughingly replied.

"Oh, I know," Eva declared. "You have some coyote babies."

"More exciting than that," Donald said. "Guess again."

"Not Elsie Slater's little baby bears surely," Mandy ventured.

Jack shook his head. "One more guess," he said.

"Let's see," Eva began thoughtfully. "What other wild animals do we have for neighbors?"

"Burros," Adele suggested.



“Burros don’t snarl, and they are too long-legged to be put in a basket, even when they are babies. Uncle Dick says that once in a long while he has seen a mountain lion.” Then, looking up with a bright smile at the lad who was riding at her side, Eva exclaimed, “I do believe that I have guessed right. Have I, Jack? Are those little growling creatures in your basket mountain lions?”

“They surely are,” Jack declared. “You have won the prize, Eva.”

“What is the prize to be?” Mandy asked.

“One of these kittens, if she wants it, for a pet,” Jack replied; and, as they had reached the corral, he dismounted and opened the gate for the others to ride through. When he unstrapped the basket and placed it on the ground, the snapping and snarling increased within. While the boys unsaddled the horses, the girls watched it almost fearfully.

Suddenly Adele gave a cry of alarm.



"Jack, come quick!" she said. "One of the lions is trying to get out."

The three girls ran for the fence, and, climbing like squirrels, they sat on the top rail to watch what would happen.

The baby lion that was trying to escape from the basket was pushed under the blanket with a stick, and then Jack looked about, as he asked, "Say, Donald, you don't happen to have a cage or any little thing like that, do you, that we could keep our wild animals in?"

Before Donald could reply, Eva called from the fence, "Oh, Jack, I know where there is a fine cage. It is up by Little Lake. It was formerly the home of Biddy Cluck and her brood, but it is unoccupied now."

"The very thing," Jack declared, as he shouldered the basket. "Let the procession proceed."

The girls followed the boys, but hung back, ready to fly if a young lion so much as poked its nose out of the basket.

The cage in question was truly a fine one,



being no less than a good-sized box, with slats nailed over the opening. Donald loosened one of these, and Jack, tipping the basket against the opening, lifted the blanket, and the baby lions, perhaps thinking that the box was their den, darted into it and the slat was replaced.

"Oh, aren't they the cunningest things!" Adele cried, as the three girls, no longer afraid, knelt and peered in.

"They look exactly like kittens," Mandy declared. "They have such pretty faces. They don't look as though they would grow up to be fierce, wild animals."

"Let's keep them," Eva said. "I think if we fed them well and petted them, they would soon be quite tame."

"Excuse me from being the one to pet them," Mandy declared, as the three baby lions snarled and growled at them.

"Well, you girls may have them to do with as you like," Jack said. "I am to have the skin of the mother-lion. Pete kept it out at the shack, and he is going to cure it



for me. I want to take it back East to show Bob and the other boys. I think I'll hang it on the wall of my room."

"Bob doesn't know what fun he is missing, does he, Jack?" Adele inquired. "We surely do have one adventure after another."

"And, unless I am very much mistaken, we are about to have another," Jack declared, standing up and listening intently.

"Why, what do you hear? Do you think some one is coming?" Adele asked.

"I'm sure of it," her brother replied, with a twinkle in his eyes. The three girls looked up toward the mesa trail and down toward the corral, but neither horse nor automobile was in sight.

"You are just joking," Eva said. "There is no one coming."

"No, I'm not joking. Somebody is coming," Jack said, winking at Donald.

Then it was that Adele clapped her hands gleefully. "Oh, I hear it now. Eva, don't you hear that whirring, humming noise? It must be Captain Nelson in his airplane."



The five young people shaded their eyes and gazed up into the gleaming blue.

“I see it! I see it!” Eva cried excitedly. “Somebody is waving his cap to us. I hope it is Captain Nelson. Oh, good! Here’s Uncle Dick!” The big airplane was approaching rapidly, and the five young people, with Uncle Dick following, hurried down to the flat place near the corral, where the machine had landed before.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

### A VISITOR FROM THE AIR

WHEN the airplane landed, they ran toward it and gladly welcomed the young aviator who stepped out.

"Oh, Captain Nelson," Adele cried, "how wonderful it must be to have wings like a bird and fly wherever you want to go."

"And we are so glad you wanted to fly over here," Mr. Dearman said genially, as he shook hands with the young man. "We thought you had forgotten your promise to dine with us soon."

"No, indeed, I did not forget," Captain Nelson replied. "We have been very busy at camp. I've been hovering over Mexico, watching the movements of the Yaqui Indians. I believe they are going to cause us some trouble before many moons."

Mr. Dearman looked grave as they started



walking toward the ranch house. "I have often wished of late that our ranch was farther from the border. It is only twelve miles away, and in these troubled times that is much too near. But let us talk of something else; I do not wish the young people to be frightened needlessly."

The three girls, who had lingered behind to examine the aircraft, now joined them, and when the house was reached they skipped to the kitchen to assist Señora Gabriella in hastening the dinner.

This was served on the veranda, and the young people listened with so much interest to the exciting stories the captain told that they almost forgot to eat. Bearing in mind Mr. Dearman's wish that the girls should not be needlessly frightened by the border conditions, the captain said nothing of them. As they rose to leave the table, the telephone rang, and Eva skipped to the living-room to answer it. Then, turning, she called, "Uncle Dick, it is Mr. Slater, and he wishes to speak to you."



Then, when her uncle had gone to the telephone, Eva, rejoining the others, said: "Something must have happened over at Double Bar ranch. Mr. Slater seemed very much excited."

"They are only two miles from the Mexican border," Jack remarked; "and if rumors are true, they are liable to see some fighting before many days. What do you think, Captain Nelson?"

Before the aviator could reply, Mr. Dearman returned. Eva, noting his troubled expression, caught hold of his arm, exclaiming, "What is it, Uncle Dick? Is anything wrong at Double Bar Ranch?"

"I will explain to you later, Eva," her uncle said. "I wish first to consult with our guest. Captain Nelson, will you accompany me for a few moments?"

"Willingly," the young man replied, and the two went out to the bench near Little Lake.

"Mr. Slater just telephoned from Double Bar," Mr. Dearman began, "and he is very



much troubled by rumors of a band of Yaqui Indians that are hiding in the mountains across the border and are planning raids on the near-by ranches. Of course, Double Bar would be the first that they would reach, and Mr. Slater does not wish Elsie to remain there another night. He says that he cannot spare a man to accompany her to our place, and he most certainly does not wish her to ride alone. He would rather have her meet a grizzly bear in the mountain pass than a Yaqui Indian. He wanted to know if one of our boys would ride over and get her."

"Better still, I will fly over and bring her back in short order," Captain Nelson said.

"Good!" Mr. Dearman exclaimed, rising. "Then perhaps you had better start at once. Not that I wish to hurry a guest, but the need may be very urgent. I do not wish to alarm the girls, so I will tell them only part of the truth, but I must tell the boys, for, since we are only twelve miles from the border, we may need to be on the alert ourselves."



"I doubt if a Yaqui Indian would venture this far, Mr. Dearman," the young aviator said; "but Double Bar Ranch is liable to be visited any night, I do believe."

Mr. Dearman, seeing the two cowboys about to start for the corral, called to them, and in quiet tones explained just what had happened. When he had finished, the aviator said, "Jack, if you wish, you may accompany me to Double Bar. That is, if Mr. Dearman can spare you."

"Yes, indeed, take the lad," the older man said. Then, turning toward the veranda where the three girls sat with their sewing, Mr. Dearman called, "Eva, the captain is going to fly. You and the girls come down and watch him spread his wings."

"Oh, Captain Nelson!" Eva exclaimed regretfully. "I did hope you were going to stay longer. You did not even finish that interesting story you were telling us."

The young aviator smiled. He had sis-



ters of his own, and this group made him think of that happy home so far away.

"We shall be back directly," he said. "Jack and I are going on only a short flight, and sometime I intend to take you girls for a ride to the clouds if you would not be afraid."

"Of course we wouldn't be afraid," Della declared.

They had been approaching the corral as they talked. Jack and the captain took their places, machinery began to whir, and a few moments later, graceful as a bird, the big airplane soared over the mountains toward Double Bar Ranch.

"What can it all mean?" Eva wondered, as she and the two girls returned to the veranda. Her uncle had said nothing to her about the mission upon which the captain had departed.

At Double Bar Elsie was busily occupied with her housekeeping duties, when she heard a strange, whirring noise. Hurrying to the porch, she saw the airplane descend-



ing, and a moment later her father and uncle were welcoming two men. She recognized Jack at once.

Mr. Tom Slater was indeed glad to have an opportunity to send Elsie away. "I feel so worried that I can't bear to have her on the place another night," he told the newcomers.

"You are right, Mr. Slater," the young aviator said seriously. "I saw only yesterday a band of Yaqui Indians making for the mountains just south of here. Personally, I think that some of our soldiers ought to be encamped at this spot, and I will report the matter to the colonel as soon as I return to headquarters at Douglas."

"Here comes Elsie now," Mr. Slater said quickly. "I am merely going to tell her that she is to go to Bar X for a week's visit."

When the girl heard this she was overjoyed.

"Oh, Papa Tom," she said as she threw her arms about her devoted father, "how can you get on a whole week without me to



fry your bacon and eggs and—and everything? ”

Her father laughed as he said: “ How do you suppose I got on while you were away at boarding school? A week will pass quickly, and I know that you are just pining for the company of those three girl neighbors of ours.”

“ Right you are, Daddy dear. And wasn’t it good of them to ask me over again so soon? Wouldn’t it be better, though, for me to have them come over here for a week first? It would be manners, you know, for I was there last.”

“ You may have them some other time,” her father said hurriedly. “ Now skip along and toss what you need into your bag, for the captain here is eager to get back to Douglas.”

Elsie, suspecting not at all the real reason for her hasty departure, skipped gayly into the house to make ready for her aërial journey. She had never ridden in an aircraft, and she was delighted to have the oppor-



tunity. She clung fast to Jack's arm as the big machine took to the air. Then she waved her handkerchief to the men below, who were rapidly growing so small that at last they were mere specks, then vanished altogether, and Elsie looked above and about her at the shining blue. Before she recovered from her awe, Bar X was below them, and the big machine, circling about, was slowly descending earthward.



## CHAPTER THIRTY

### TROUBLESOME RUMORS

THE three girls, still seated with their sewing on the veranda of Bar X, ran to greet the returning aviators, little dreaming that their loved Elsie Slater was a passenger in the descending craft.

Eva, shading her eyes, looked up. "I think there are three persons in the machine now."

"Yes, there are," Adele declared, "and I do believe that one is a girl. Who can it be?"

"It must be Elsie Slater," Mandy had just said, when the machine, skimming over the ground toward them, came to a standstill, and then they knew for sure that their surmise had been correct.

"Oh, you darling Elsie Slater!" Eva cried. "How glad we are to see you!"



Elsie looked puzzled. "Why, didn't you know I was coming?" she inquired. "I thought that you had invited me to spend a week."

Luckily Mr. Dearman came up just then, and he hastily exclaimed, "I was the one who sent the invitation, Elsie. I wanted to surprise the girls."

"Oh, Uncle Dick!" Eva cried. "You are always doing something to make us happy. We would rather have a visit from Elsie than anything that we could think of."

Jack lifted the girl's bag and was about to climb out himself when Captain Nelson said, "Mr. Dearman, if you can spare Jack for a day or two, I would like to take him back to Douglas with me."

"Indeed he may go," Mr. Dearman replied. "We are to brand the young calves over in the valley pasture to-morrow, and Jack doesn't take to that occupation any too kindly, so I am just as well pleased to have him out of the way. He thinks he is a dyed-in-the-wool cowboy by now, but when a little



calf begs not to be branded, he finds that he is still a tenderfoot at heart."

"You are right, Mr. Dearman," the boy said. "I do wish that some other way could be invented for marking the little creatures."

Eva, suspecting that her uncle would like to speak alone with Captain Nelson, bade the aviator and Jack good-by, as did the other girls, and then they returned to the ranch house. Mr. Dearman was indeed glad of this opportunity, and what he heard did not in any way lessen his fears.

"I am going to suggest that a guard be sent at once to Double Bar from the Douglas camp," the young aviator said. And then, waving their caps and starting the machinery, he and Jack were soon up in the gleaming blue.

That night the four girls retired to their adjoining rooms, and after sitting for a time in front of Eva's fireplace, on which a mesquite root crackled, they at last slipped off their kimonos and nestled in their beds. They did not know that down at the bunk-



house the men were holding a conference. Suddenly Eva was awakened by the ringing of the telephone. She sat up and listened, but did not attempt to answer it, as her uncle did so when it rang at night. But the bunk-house door was closed to exclude the light, and so Mr. Dearman did not hear. After a silence, the bell rang again.

"What is it?" Adele asked, sitting up.

"It's the telephone," Eva replied. "It keeps ringing, and I do not understand why Uncle Dick does not answer it."

Rising, she lighted the lamp and looked at the clock. "It is just midnight," she said. "Perhaps Uncle Dick is sound asleep. I would better answer it, for when a telephone rings so late at night, it must be something important."

Eva was slipping on her kimono. Elsie, Mandy, and Adele appeared in the doorway, and the four girls went to the living-room. Mandy lighted the big lamp on the table while Eva answered the 'phone.

Just at that moment the outer door opened



and Mr. Dearman appeared. He looked troubled when he saw the four girls. "Oh, did the telephone ring?" he asked as he hurried to take the receiver.

"Please go back to bed, girls," he added in a tone that Eva had not heard before. They at once obeyed, wondering, more than ever, what all the mystery might mean.

Then, when the girls were gone, Mr. Dearman turned to the telephone to receive Mr. Slater's message, which was that a cowboy had just ridden to Double Bar in all haste with the news that about a dozen Yaquis had been seen riding toward Bar X.

"I cannot understand what it means," Mr. Slater said, "but it may be only a trick. They may plan to circle around and later attack here, but anyway you'd better keep awake."

Mr. Dearman's heart was heavy as he turned from the telephone. There were four girls and two Mexican women in the house and only three men to defend them. He



had sent to the pasture earlier in the evening for Pete.

As soon as her uncle had returned to the bunk-house, Eva sat up. "Girls," she said, "are any of you asleep?"

Elsie and Mandy hurried in from their room. "Indeed, no!" Elsie replied. "I feel so sure that something is wrong, I cannot sleep a wink."

"I feel the same way," Eva declared. "Suppose we dress in our riding-habits and sit up until we know what the mystery is."

It was lucky that they did this, for just as the east was turning gray with the coming of dawn, Donald Dare galloped up from the bunk-house, leading four ponies. The girls ran out on the veranda to meet him, and he was relieved to find that they were already dressed.

"What is it, Donald?" Eva exclaimed anxiously.

"Yaquis," the cowboy replied, as he pointed across the dry creek toward the south. The girls looked and saw silhouetted



against the gray sky possibly a dozen horsemen headed in their direction.

Eva's face was very pale, but she asked calmly, "What are we to do, Donald?"

"Circle around the sand-hills, keeping hidden as much as possible, and then gallop for Silver Creek Junction," the lad told them. "Tell Mr. Wells to come in all haste with his men to help us, and you four stay with Mrs. Wells at the station until we send for you."

The girls, Elsie in the lead, galloped away on a trail leading not over the mesa, where they would have been plainly seen, but around the sand-hills and down to Silver Creek, where they were soon sheltered by steep, high banks. Not until they knew that they were safe did they venture to talk in low tones.

"Do you suppose those horsemen really were Yaquis?" Adele asked, as she rode close to Eva.

"I sincerely hope not," the other replied. "They are so cruel and lawless. Of course



the riders may not have been Indians at all. They were too far away for Uncle Dick to be sure, but Mr. Slater telephoned, you know, that a small band of Indians had been seen entering the pass, headed our way."

"But Eva," Adele inquired, "why didn't we telephone to Silver Creek Junction or to Douglas for help?"

"Because we have no connection with either place," Eva replied. "Uncle Dick and Mr. Slater strung the wires between our two ranches that they might call each other in just such a time as this, when either of them might be in trouble and need help."

Suddenly Elsie, who was in the lead, drew rein, and, turning in her saddle, she beckoned the others to ride close. Her pale face showed that she realized more than they did that they might be in danger.

"Girls," she said very quietly, "the creek curves just beyond here, as you know, and winds close to the mountains. If the Indians have stationed a sentinel there, we will be plainly seen. I think we would better



dismount and lead our horses as close to the left bank as possible, and in that way we may escape observation."

"We will do whatever you suggest," Eva replied. "You have lived on the desert for so long that I know we can rely upon your judgment."

Dismounting, and each leading her pony, the four girls crept along close to the bank. Adele, the Eastern girl, unused to adventure in her daily life, felt strangely unreal, as though she were a character in a book she was reading. But not so Elsie. She knew that in the troublous times they were having on the border, they were all in real danger, for a Yaqui shows no pity.

Suddenly she paused, and, holding up one hand to the others, she listened intently. Ahead of them, on the bank, huge boulders were lying, as though they had been flung there from the mountain by giant hands.

Elsie, whose desert-trained ears had heard a sound beyond those rocks, was listening intently. Then, convinced that some one *was*



there in hiding, she leaped to her pony's back, and, whirling it about toward Bar X, she motioned the other girls to do the same. Eva and Adele were soon on their ponies, but, unfortunately for Mandy, her saddle slipped and she could not mount. Then, to their surprise and great relief, there was a joyous shout from behind the pile of rocks, and the Indian, for a real Indian it was, leaped out and called: "Winona! Winona! Look! Here's the pretty lady!"

It was little Red Feather, the seven-year-old Papago boy whom Mandy had one time saved from the raging torrent.

So great was the relief of the girls that they almost cried, and then, around the rocks, came that beautiful Indian girl, Winona. You will remember that she had been educated in a mission school, and that Eva and Mandy had been much pleased with her when they had met her near the water-hole in the spring.

Red Feather clambered down the steep bank, and, graceful as a gazelle, Winona



followed. Eva and Mandy held out their hands and warmly welcomed this dusky Indian girl whom they had so hoped to meet again.

"I've been wishing that you'd ride back this way some time," Winona said, "and so has Red Feather. He talks so much about the 'pretty lady' who pulled him out of the wild water."

Impulsively Mandy stooped and caught the little fellow in her arms. She had suddenly remembered how near they had come to drowning, and it made her feel strangely akin to the little Papago Indian boy.

A moment later Elsie exclaimed, "But, girls, we have entirely forgotten our mission." Then, turning to Winona, she added: "There has been trouble, as you know, on the border lately and we are very much afraid of the Mexican Yaquis. We just heard that a band of them came through the mountain pass this morning, headed for Bar X Ranch. Have you seen anything of them, Winona?"





THEN, AROUND THE ROCKS, CAME THAT BEAUTIFUL INDIAN GIRL.  
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The Indian girl smiled reassuringly. "No, they were not the Yaquis," she replied. "It was Gray Hawk, our Papago chief, with several of our young men. We have been hunting in Sonora since the spring, but it wasn't safe even for us down there, and so we are on the way back to our village in the Chiricahui Mountains." Then, pointing to a clump of creosote-bushes, Winona added, "We are camping over there for a while."

The girls, looking in that direction, saw a thin line of smoke curving skyward. Winona saw it, too, and for a moment she watched it intently. The smoke seemed to be waving, as though it were being fanned.

"That is our method of sending messages to one another," Winona explained with a smile. "They are telling me to return in haste, as they have decided to break camp and continue on our journey. We will pass near your ranch, and so I may see you again."

"Then we will not say good-by," Eva told her.



When Winona and Red Feather were gone on their way, the four girls turned their ponies toward Bax X. Mr. Dearman was surprised to see them and was indeed glad to hear their good news, for the Papago Indians were friends. "Ride out and meet them," he said to Pete, "and bid them come here and dine with us. Eva, lassie, you tell Señora Gabriella to prepare for a dozen hungry guests."

How queer it all seemed to Adele, the Eastern girl. How she wished that the Sunny Six might know that she was about to dine with Papago Indians.

Adele little dreamed that something very much more exciting was about to happen.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

### WONDERFUL NEWS

THE week following the visit of the Papago Indians had been a happy one for the four girls. Captain Nelson, having returned with Jack from Douglas, informed them that the danger of a raid was past, for a company of soldiers had been stationed on the border, near the Slater ranch. And then he added, with his pleasant smile, "And I, in my good ship of the air, will keep a constant outlook, and will warn the camp if there is an uprising in Sonora, so you young people may ride where you will without fear of being molested."

Elsie, as had been her plan, stayed a week, and then, with Jack as escort, she rode back to Double Bar ranch, telling the girls that they must come soon to return her visit. They said that they surely would, but before



they had carried out this plan, something happened which made them forget all else for a time.

Jack and Donald Dare had been riding the range near Douglas, turning back the Bar X cattle that had strayed in that direction. On their return they came galloping down the mesa trail, firing shots into the air. The girls ran out of the house, fearing that the Yaquis were upon them, but when they saw the boys, Adele exclaimed, "Oh, Jack, how could you frighten us that way?" Then she added, when she saw her brother's glowing face: "Oh, Jackie! You have some news for us. What is it?"

"I sure have!" that lad replied. "Della, you never can guess what is going to arrive to-day."

"Oh, Buddie!" Adele cried eagerly. "Is it coming in an aircraft?"

"No," Jack replied mysteriously. "It's coming in a box."

"Why, then, it must be a present,—candy or something like that," Adele surmised.



"No," Jack replied. "You're just ever so cold. The box I mean rolls along on wheels."

"Oh, I believe I know," Eva exclaimed. "Am I allowed to guess?"

"Of course you are," Della declared.

"Maybe Jack means a box car," Eva said.

"Getting warmer," that youth chanted.

"But there, I won't keep you in suspense any longer," he added. "Here is a letter that will tell you all about it."

Adele took the letter, and, with a joyful exclamation, she cried: "Oh, Eva, it's from Bob Angel. Let's all sit down on the steps and I'll read it aloud to you."

This done, Adele began:

**"HELLO, RATTLESNAKE JACK!**

"Here's some news for you! A great and grand and glorious thing has happened, and the girls have asked me to write and tell you about it. Well, to begin at the beginning, Doris Drexel's father, who, as you know, is a rich banker over in Dorchester, has recently acquired some mining property in Bisbee, Arizona, and next week he starts



thitherward to inspect his new possessions. He is planning to travel in the company's private car, and, if there happens to be room in it for a few small and unimportant persons, he told Doris that she might ask some of her friends to accompany them. Haven't heard yet whether there is going to be room enough for the 'angels,' but if there is, you will soon hear the fluttering of their wings.

"Say, Jack, old man, you have no idea how wild I am to try riding a bucking broncho. Well, here's hoping that there'll be room in the banker's private car for yours truly,

"BOB ANGEL."

"But, Jack," Adele exclaimed, "I thought you said something was going to happen to-day."

"So it is," her brother gleefully declared. "I had a telegram from Bob this morning, and here comes the equipage that is to take us to the station," he added.

Adele's joy knew no bounds when she heard that her dearly loved friends from the far-away East were about to visit the desert. How she did hope that Gertrude Willis would be among them, for, much as she



loved them all, Gertrude was a little nearer and dearer to her than the rest.

The equipage which was to take them to the station rolled up from the corral, and the girls laughed gayly when they saw it, for it was no other than the great lumbering hayrack which was used each early summer to bring the cut grass from the valley pasture.

Four horses were pulling it, and Donald Dare was driving and snapping a long whip. The girls climbed in and sat on the straw-covered bottom, while Jack and Rusty Pete rode alongside on their lively ponies.

"I'm so glad that we have on our cowgirl suits," Adele exclaimed, as they rumbled up the mesa trail.

"And Pete and I have blank cartridges in our guns," Jack chuckled. "We want to impress these tenderfoot Easterners when they arrive. All they know about the West is what they have seen in moving pictures, and it never would do to disappoint them,



We have several fine plans to keep them startled, haven't we, Pete, old man?" Jack added, with a wink at the cowboy.

It was eight miles to the Silver Creek Junction, where Jack had wired Bob that he would meet them. The train was just slowing down as they approached, and Jack and Pete, galloping alongside, fired shots into the air. A dozen startled faces appeared in the windows, and among them Adele saw several of her friends. Bob was the first to alight, and Jack, whirling a lasso, caught the surprised boy around the waist and pulled him over toward his horse. Bob's pleasant, freckled face beamed with pleasure.

"Well, Jack, old pal, I swan! Surely my eyes don't see straight! That can't be you!" Bob cried in admiration mingled with amazement. And no wonder he was surprised, for back East he had known Jack as an indolent, easy-going fellow who didn't care to play football because it was too much of an effort, and who would never wear over-



alls, and had more new neckties each year than all the other boys put together.

Jack leaped from his horse and gave Bob a royal welcome. Then he turned to meet the three other lads who were in the party. In the meantime the girls who had come were being hugged, and even laughed and cried over; for when Adele found that Gertrude Willis was really among them, she clung to her with tears rolling down her cheeks, as she whispered, "I don't know why I cry, Trudie dear, unless it is because you make me think so much of Mother. I guess maybe I'm beginning to be pretty homesick to see my dear, darling Mumsie. It's three months since I came here; but there, I must remember that I am a Sunny-sider."

Peggy Pierce, Betty Burd, Bertha Angel, Rosamond Wright, and, of course, Doris Drexel, were in the party; and after Adele had hugged them all they climbed into the queer equipage, which then rumbled on its way back over the desert. When they



reached the top of the mesa trail the Easterners uttered exclamations of delight, for the ranch house, with Little Lake, surrounded by trees, was indeed a pretty sight out there on the wide, gleaming desert.

They were welcomed a moment later by Uncle Dick, who said that he wanted them all to feel, while they were there, that the Bar X ranch was their very own home, and that they could do just anything that they pleased.

"The ponies in the small pasture yonder are for your use, and you may each choose one to ride," he added.

The young people looked in the direction that Uncle Dick had indicated, and saw, in a fenced enclosure, a dozen cow ponies. One among them, a lively young broncho, was entertaining the rest by galloping madly around and then stopping to kick up his heels.

"I choose him for mine," Bob said.

The cowboys laughed. They anticipated some fun when Tenderfoot Bob tried to ride



the broncho of his choice, but they did not begin to anticipate it as much as Bob did. He wanted to try riding the pony at once, but Señora Gabriella appeared in the doorway and announced that supper was ready, and so Jack led the boys to the bunk-house to wash, while Adele took the girls to their rooms in the ranch house.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

### BOB COMES TO THE FRONT

EARLY the next morning the young people were up and dressed in the old clothes that they had brought for roughing it on the desert.

"How still it is!" Rosamond said, as the girls stood on the veranda, watching the boys wrangle the ponies.

"Adele, didn't it seem queer to you when you first came, not having a neighbor's house anywhere in sight?" Betty Burd asked.

"It did, indeed," Adele replied, "and for a time it was a lonely feeling. But now, when I go back to Sunnyside and have neighbors only a stone's throw on either side of me, I am sure that I shall feel smothered and crowded."

"When you feel that way," Bertha Angel



laughingly declared, "we'll have to go out to our log cabin in Buttercup Meadows."

"Oh, girls! Does it look just the same as it did?" Adele asked. "Are the buttercups thick and pretty this year?"

"I was over there the day before we came away," Gertrude replied, putting her arm around her friend's waist, "and in the sunshine the meadow looked just like a sheet of gold."

"I'd love to see it before the buttercups have all faded," Adele said rather wistfully as she and Gertrude walked down toward Little Lake. "I've had such a wonderful time, Trudie, here on the desert, and I haven't been a bit homesick until you came. Now I'm sort of wishing that I was going back with you all in the private car next week, but Mumsie wouldn't be there, and that would make me lonelier than ever."

"Della! Gertrude! Come on! The procession is about to proceed!" Bob called, making a trumpet of his hands. So the two girls who loved each other so dearly turned



back to join the others, and Della tried to throw off her wistful home-longing and be merry with the others.

"This is a circus," Jack declared, "and I am the ringmaster. The first act will be broncho-busting by Bob Angel, tenderfoot. Make the circle bigger, ladies and gentlemen, and give the broncho plenty of room in which to buck."

The laughing crowd of young people stood back while Rusty led the liveliest pony blindfolded into their midst.

"Now, Bob," he called, "I'll hold him until you are on."

Boldly Bob gave a leap and landed on the back of the cow pony. This was a signal for it to rear and plunge and try to throw its rider.

"Hold on tight!" Jack shouted.

Bob, with his arms around the pony's neck, followed Jack's directions. It surely was a wild ride that he had. Part of the time the pony seemed to be trying to stand on its head, and again it actually walked



on its hind legs, but like a burr Bob stuck on.

"That's great sport," the boy declared when he was again on terra firma, "but, for straight-ahead riding I guess I will choose another pony." This he did, and a few moments later the merry party started on a gallop over the wide, smooth Silver Creek trail.

The Eastern boys, not content with the jogging pace the girls had set, galloped over the sun-baked sand and were soon out of sight beyond the low hills. Adele and Gertrude, who were happy just to be alone together, rode along slowly, side by side, and were soon far back of the others.

"Della," Gertrude was saying, "how wonderfully well Amanda Brown rides, doesn't she? I never saw such a change in a girl. You know, when we first found her in the Sunnyside orphanage she looked so cross and fretful. We never even thought that she was pretty then, but now her face is simply glowing with happiness, and sev-



eral times I have heard her joyously singing in that sweet, bird-like voice of hers."

"I have noticed it, too," Adele said, "and she is constantly thinking of loving things to do, especially for Eva and Uncle Dick. She is so grateful to them for having brought her out here on the desert, away from the orphanage. We all love Amanda dearly, and as for Rusty Pete, I do believe that he thinks she is the most wonderful girl that ever lived. He said to me one day, 'Miss Adele, there's many a man wouldn't have done the brave deed that slip of a girl did when she faced a mountain torrent to save a mere Indian boy.'"

"Which is Rusty Pete?" Gertrude inquired.

"The cowboy who is riding at Amanda's side," Adele had just replied, when Gertrude, drawing rein, suddenly exclaimed, "Hark! What is that noise?"

The others also heard it, and turned to look back. Rusty Pete, with his desert-trained ears, was not long in doubt, and,



speaking quickly to Mandy, he whirled his pony and galloped back, shading his eyes and gazing across the shimmering sand. Then the girls saw a wide and dense cloud of sand that was being hurled toward them, and the noise, which grew louder with each passing second, Rusty knew to be the thud of many madly galloping feet.

"A stampede!" he cried. "Make for the hills, every one."

The Eastern girls, not even knowing what a stampede might be, did as they were told. Their ponies, sensing danger, needed no urging, but galloped toward the sand-hills. When they had reached a high place, the girls dismounted and watched the herd of wild, frightened cattle which surged madly along. Then suddenly they saw something which struck terror to their hearts.

The Eastern boys, Bob and Jack in the lead, had galloped ahead of the others and were soon out of sight around the low sand-hills. Suddenly Jack drew rein and listened intently.



"Bob," he said, "do you hear a rumbling noise, like distant thunder?"

"Yes, I do," Bob replied. "What do you think it is?"

"A cloudburst in the mountains, like as not," Jack surmised. "I have heard Rusty Pete describe the one they had last spring, and yet I did not suppose that they came at this time of the year. Let's ride back and ask Rusty what he thinks it is."

The two tenderfoot lads, little dreaming of danger, galloped back toward Silver Creek. Bob was in the lead, and as his pony whirled around the hill he was thrown to the ground, directly in front of the frightened and maddened herd of cattle. Jack, with a cry of terror, drew rein so suddenly that his horse reared and walked backwards on its hind legs. That alone saved him from poor Bob's fate.

On the hill Donald and the girls had seen what had happened, and when the cattle had passed they galloped down to the spot where Bob had fallen, expecting to find him



trodden to death; but fate had been kind to him, for he had been thrown close to a giant cactus, bristling with thorns, which threatened destruction to the man or beast who came too near. The mass of cattle had swerved and passed it by.

Jack lifted Bob, who had been stunned by the fall, and who, when he was quite recovered, exclaimed merrily, "Well, Jack, is this the way you initiate your friends into the Wild West fraternity?"

"Oh, Bob," Bertha sobbed, clinging to her brother, "I do believe that I am much more scared than you are."

"But, Bertha, Bob isn't hurt," Adele said. "If he were, he wouldn't joke that way."

"Oh, yes, he would," Bertha declared tearfully. "Bob would joke at his own funeral."

"I'm all right, Sis, honest Injun, I am," Bob declared. "And, now that it's all over, I'm glad that it happened. Jack and I will have great adventures to tell the fellows back home, won't we, old man?"



"That we will," Jack replied, realizing that Bob was trying to make light of his recent danger for the sake of the girls. "I'll tell you what, they call me Rattlesnake Jack, and we'll have to name you Stampede Bob."

"Something tells me that we had better go home," Eva said, trying to speak merrily. "Who knows but that the cattle may take a notion to return?"

"Where do you suppose they came from?" Jack asked Pete when they were again in their saddles, riding toward the Bar X.

"They were being rounded up over at Slater's, and some little thing happened which frightened them. They will run until they are tired, and then they will stop to rest and graze; and when the cowboys find them, they will be ready to come back quite peaceably."

"Can't we fellows go to the round-up?" Bob inquired. "I'd like right well to see how it is done. I've read about it so often."



"And, oh, please do take us, too," Bertha implored.

All the girls declared that they would like to go, so, when they reached home, Mr. Dearman's consent was obtained and they looked eagerly forward to the next day, when, for the first time, they would witness a really, truly round-up.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

### THE ROUND-UP

It was just before dawn when there came a light rap-tap-tap on the door of Eva's room.

Springing up, she asked, "What is it, Uncle Dick?"

"If you girls are going with us to the round-up," her uncle replied, "you must make haste, for we shall be in the saddle in less than an hour."

"We'll be ready!" Eva responded.

Adele sat up in bed and sleepily rubbed her eyes. "Is it morning yet?" she asked wonderingly.

"The sun isn't up," Eva gayly replied, "but the daughters must be if they want to go to the round-up."

"Ohee!" Adele called gayly, as she sprang



out of bed. "This particular daughter wouldn't miss that round-up for worlds."

Eva, slipping on her kimono, went out into the living-room and tapped on the other bedroom doors, bidding the girls make haste to dress.

Fifteen minutes later, just as the sun was flaming the east with gold and rose, nine maidens, not yet wide-awake, went out to the veranda breakfast-room. They found that the men had finished, and were down at the corral, saddling the many ponies that would be required to take such a large party across the desert.

Soon the girls were trooping in that direction, the ponies were mounted, and away they started, the men in the lead.

"Oh, Della," Gertrude cried with enthusiasm, "is there another place anywhere that has such wonderful early mornings? The air is so crispy cool, and it fairly sparkles!"

"Isn't it glorious!" Adele replied with a radiant smile. "And if it wasn't for Mum-



sie and Daddy, I don't believe that I would ever be tempted to go back East again."

They reached the steep trail that led down into the dry creek-bottom. Peggy Pierce was at the end of the long line, and they had all ascended the other bank when they heard her calling. Turning, they were surprised to see that she had not ridden down the embankment.

"Oh, girls," Peggy cried timidly, "I don't dare to go down that steep trail. I don't see how you dared do it!"

Rusty Pete rode back to the creek-bottom and said reassuringly, "Now, Miss Peggy, you don't have to do anything. Just sit still and let your pony do the doing. Come on, Brownny," he added coaxingly.

That small brown horse was one of Rusty's "string," and so it immediately began picking its way carefully down the truly steep trail, while Peggy Pierce, after giving one terrorized gasp, screwed her eyes tight shut until she had safely descended.

When they were all up on the level desert



trail, which stretched ahead for several miles to the Bald Mountains, Eva called, "Girls, let's race to the giant cactus!"

Such a glorious ride as they had! Eva won, and soon thereafter they entered the canyon where Elsie Slater had met the bear. Jack pointed out the rocky ledge where she had tried to hide, and the girls shuddered when they thought of her narrow escape.

"I wish a bear would come along now," Bertha declared. "We are well protected, and I would like to meet Bruin in his native haunt."

The canyon was not a long one, and as soon as they were in the open again, they sighted the Double Bar ranch, which the three girls had so long planned to visit.

Elsie saw them coming, and was out on the veranda to welcome them. She was waving the very red silk handkerchief which had been such a mystery at one time. When the gay cavalcade galloped up to the ranch house, Elsie ran down with shining eyes,



and Mr. Daniel Moore followed close behind her.

“Oh, Mr. Moore, I am so glad to see you again,” Adele called as she leaped from her pony. “Girls! This is the nice man who piloted Jack and me across that terrible Chicago. I wrote you all about him.”

Mr. Moore acknowledged this general introduction, and assisted the young people to alight. Then Elsie led them into the ranch house, which was very like Bar X.

“Oh, girls,” she cried joyously, “you can’t guess how glad I am that you all came over; but I am going to be just terribly busy this morning, for there is no telling when the cattle will be driven in, and we are to have twenty cowboys to dinner. Mrs. Dickson and Mrs. Darkus are here helping me, and Uncle Tim and Uncle Daniel Moore are barbecuing a young steer. Come on out in the kitchen and watch us if you want to. I am just getting the potatoes ready to boil.”

Elsie led the way to a very large kitchen,



where the three girls who knew Mrs. Dickson and Mrs. Darkus greeted them cordially, and Elsie introduced the others.

Then Adele exclaimed, "Elsie Slater, do you mean to say that you are going to boil that whole bushel of potatoes?"

"Every one of them," that young lady laughingly replied. Then, rolling up her sleeves and taking a brush, she began to scour the vegetables mentioned.

"Give me an apron and a brush," Adele begged. "I want to help. Isn't there something the other girls can do? I know they would rather be useful than ornamental."

"There is, indeed, if they really want to work," Elsie replied. "Uncle Daniel has made a long table with saw-horses and boards and it stands just outside the kitchen-door, in the shade of the house. If some of you will set it, that will help a lot. Mrs. Darkus will show you where the roll of oil-cloth is, and the round-up dishes. You know we have this big party twice a year," Elsie



added, "and so we have special things to use at that time."

Soon every one was merrily busy, and the Eastern girls declared that never before had they had so much fun.

A great caldron was placed on the huge kitchen range, and the potatoes, with their jackets on, were soon gently boiling. Mrs. Dickson was making quantities of corn-bread, and Mrs. Darkus had gone to the cooling-cellar, to procure a custard, which was to be heaped with whipped cream. Betty Burd followed her, and then called, "Oh, girls, come quick! Did you ever see so many pans of milk at once, and do look at all of that thick, yellow cream!"

"Yum! Yum!" Rosamond exclaimed. "I do believe that I will marry a cowboy if I can persuade one to have me."

"I am thinking of taking up that profession," a merry voice called back of them, and, whirling around, the girls were surprised to see Bob Angel, who was smiling at them mischievously.



But Rose did not like to be teased, and so with a toss of her curly head, she retreated into the kitchen.

"Why, Bob," Adele said, "where did you come from? I thought you were out rounding up the cattle, whatever that may mean."

"So I have been," the lad replied. "But now I am the fore-rider, and I was sent ahead to notify Elsie that the cattle will arrive in this valley in about twenty minutes. Her father wished me to tell her that he would send the men in relays of ten each." Then, as Mrs. Darkus appeared from the cellar with a great bowl of thick, yellow cream, Bob called toward the kitchen-door, "Rosie! Don't you let the first relay eat all of that cream. Save a little of it for your cowboy."

There was no reply, and so the merry lad, mounting his pony, galloped away.

Then, what a hurry and scurry there was in the Double-Bar kitchen. The girls, who



had on big aprons, dipped out the mealy potatoes and peeled enough for ten hungry men, while Mr. Moore appeared with a quarter of beef cooked a savory brown. Just when everything was ready, there was a whooping and bellowing without. Peggy Pierce, running to the veranda, called, "Oh, girls, look quick! See that big herd of cattle coming around the mountains. And ten cowboys are galloping this way at top speed and shouting like wild Indians."

Mr. Darkus and Mr. Dickson and their cowboys were in this first relay, and soon they were standing in line, taking turns at splashing in the big basins of water which had been prepared for them on a bench outside the kitchen-door.

Doris Drexel, Peggy, Gertrude, and Bertha were the waitresses, and Peggy declared afterwards that she had not supposed that men could be so hungry. There was much laughter and joking among the cowboys, and it kept Bertha busy just filling and refilling the glasses with lemonade.



Then, before long, they were gone and the other relay arrived.

Rosamond, Elsie, Eva, and Adele were the waitresses this time, and Bob gave one of them a merry glance as she passed him by. He noticed that she purposely avoided looking at him, and, when it came to the dessert, he called gayly, "Rosie, do you remember what I asked you?"

Now Rose had hidden an especially tempting dish of custard, heaped with whipped cream, and, relenting, she brought it out. As she set it before him, Bob said softly in her ear, "Don't be mad at me, Rosie! I won't be a cowboy if you don't want me to. Just name the profession that you prefer and I'll be it, even if it is the President of the United States."

"Oh, Bob, you're such a tease," that pretty girl replied as she hurried into the kitchen.

Then, when the men had gone back to the valley to start cutting out the cattle, the women and girls had their dinner, and



Peggy declared that she believed that she herself was as hungry as the men had been.

They all helped clear the things away, and in an incredibly short time the kitchen was as tidy as could be.

Elsie, taking off her big apron, called gayly, "Now, girls, get on your hats, and let's go and watch the round-up."



## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

### DONALD DARE'S RANCH

JOYFULLY the girls climbed a high sand-mound, and, sitting in a row, watched the cowboys cutting out cattle bearing the different brands. These were kept bunched together.

When at last it was all over and Miguel had driven the Bar X cattle away and the other men had departed with theirs, Mr. Dearman rode up and said, "Well, Eva, suppose you girls get ready now to return home."

"Oh, Mr. Dearman," Elsie cried, "how I do wish that they could stay all night with me; that is, if they can sleep three in a bed."

"Oh, of course we can!" Betty Burd declared. "We could sleep four in a bed if need be; at least, I'm sure that I could."



"I think that it would be jolly fun to stay," Eva replied; "and we'll all come riding home to-morrow morning."

Mr. Dearman willingly consented to this plan, and the boys from Bar X decided to remain and camp for the night in a hollow not far from the house.

Donald Dare wanted to visit his ranch, which was only a few miles away in Hog Canyon, and he asked Adele if she and some of the other girls would like to go with him.

Most of them said that they would rather rest, not being used to the saddle, and Mandy and Eva were planning to help Elsie prepare for so many guests. But little Betty Burd, who loved nothing better than a canter on her wiry pony, gladly accepted, and soon the three galloped away over the hard, white sand.

"Oh, what a picturesque place this is!" Adele exclaimed in delight, as they paused at the entrance to the most beautiful little canyon on the desert. In the valley there



were cottonwood trees, and a stream purred among them, for higher up there was a mountain spring of cool sparkling water, which was seldom dry. A small adobe house was built in the shelter of the trees.

"I'm glad you like it," Donald declared. "I love this little place, and, if I can manage to live here part of the time for three years and make improvements on it, then it will truly be my very own. I have fifty head of cattle now, and Mr. Dearman is going to look out for them while I am away at school. Rusty Pete and Miguel will brand my new calves, so that I need not lose them, and each summer I will spend my vacation here. Then, when I am a young man," he added, turning to Adele with his frank, boyish smile, "I mean to build a real artistic Swiss chalet on the mountain-side and live here part of every year."

"I almost wish that I were a boy," Adele said brightly, "for I do so enjoy this life."

"So do I," chimed in Betty Burd. "Oh, Della, couldn't we ask the Government to



give us a piece of the desert for our very own? ”

“ I’m afraid not, Little One,” Adele laughingly replied; and soon thereafter, when Donald reported that everything was all right on his ranch, they turned their horses’ heads once more toward Double Bar.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

### AROUND THE CAMP FIRE

AFTER supper the boys who had remained to escort the girls homeward the next day, disappeared with two of Mr. Slater's cowboys, and, just as it was beginning to grow dark, they came to the ranch door and asked the girls to accompany them. As it was cool, the puzzled maidens slipped on their sweater-coats and went out.

"I wonder where they are leading us," Adele said to Elsie, who was walking at her side.

"Oh, I suppose they have planned a frolic for our entertainment," Elsie replied gayly.

The trail led down into a sandy hollow, which was sheltered from the winds, and there, in the middle of it, the girls saw a pile of mesquite roots and whole bushes near by.

"Welcome to our camp," Jack called



merrily as he stooped with a lighted match, and instantly the dry leaves and twigs caught fire and sent brilliant flames leaping up into the gathering darkness.

"Sit down, fair maids, in a circle around our camp fire," Bob Angel exclaimed, "and you will have the pleasure of hearing a few tales of the wild and woolly West."

Such a merry hour followed, for each cowboy tried to tell a tale more startling than the one before, and some of them were so truly scary that the girls huddled close together, and Rosamond uttered such a sincere cry of fright that Bob leaped to her side, and, sitting down on the sand, remarked, "I see that I am needed over here to protect this little flower girl."

"You might just as well have chosen that place in the beginning, Bob," his sister Bertha teased, "since we all knew that sooner or later you would arrive there."

Bob chuckled as he said, "Don't you mind what they say, Rosie." Then, knowing that the golden-haired maiden did not like to be



teased, he hastily added, "Now all of the cowboys have told an adventure except Pete. Say, old man, tell us, how did you happen to get that name, Rusty?"

"Oh, when I was a little shaver I lived in a copper camp. I used to go down in the mines and come out covered with the dust, and the men said that I looked rusty," that cowboy smilingly replied. "You see, there isn't any story to it."

"All right, then," Bob declared. "If that part of our program is over, we will begin on the next. Up, everybody, and join in an Indian powwow. You girls watch us boys, and do just what we do."

Every one sprang up, and the boys, shrieking "Ki! Yi!" ran about the fire, holding their hands high above them, and doing all of the wild Indian antics which they had often witnessed on the moving-picture screen. The girls, entering into the fun, tried to do likewise, and such shouting and laughter as there was in that desert hollow. Now and then a dry mesquite bush was



thrown on the fire, and the flames, leaping up into fresh brilliancy, lighted the many glowing faces.

At last, all out of breath, Rosamond sank to the sand and the other girls followed her example.

"Now," spokesman Bob announced, "the second part of our program being successfully completed, we will begin upon the third."

"Oh, Bob!" Elsie declared, "I fear it is long past our bedtime, but it's all such jolly fun that we don't want to stop."

"Part three closes our entertainment for this evening," Bob told her; and the girls, wondering what it could be, found out a moment later.

Bob and Jack, with long poppers filled with corn, knelt by the fire, which had been allowed to die down to glowing embers, and then, when the kernels were puffed and white, it was salted and passed around, that each guest might take a handful. Donald soon appeared with a bucket, which, he told



them, contained the choicest of beverages, and then he offered each fair maid a dipper of spring water.

When the girls at last arose to depart, they appointed Elsie as spokesman, and she dramatically exclaimed, "Cowboys! In the name of your fair guests, whom you have so royally entertained this evening, I wish to thank you."

Then Bob and Jack seized burning mesquite roots from the camp fire and lighted the way back to the ranch house.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

### FAREWELL TO THE DESERT

WHEN the gay cavalcade of young people rode up the Silver Creek trail toward Bar X the next morning, they beheld Miguel coming down from the mesa. He had been to the Junction, to get the mail.

As soon as the girls saw him they started their ponies on a gallop, shouting joyfully, "Letters from home!"

The smiling Mexican tossed the mail-pouch to Mr. Dearman, who had come out on the porch to receive it, and the girls gathered about him.

"Oh, Mr. Postman, please give me a letter!" they chorused eagerly.

There were letters for all, and the last one Mr. Dearman held high, as he teasingly inquired, "Now, which of you maidens will have this one?"



"I will!" Adele called, and the beaming postman dropped it into her outstretched hands.

"Oh, brother!" that happy girl cried, "it's from Mumsie, and it bears a Liverpool postmark. Do you suppose that means that they are starting for home?"

The month previous Mrs. Doring had accompanied her husband to England on a business trip, and it had made Adele lonelier to think that an ocean as well as a continent lay between them.

"If you are really curious," Jack suggested, "suppose you open the letter and find out."

This was done, and the two brown heads bent over the paper for one moment. Then, with a cry of joy, Adele danced about, hugging whoever came in her way, her eyes shining with happiness.

"Della!" Eva exclaimed. "Do tell us what's in the letter."

"Mumsie and Dad are coming home. They will be in Sunnyside next week," Adele



exclaimed breathlessly. "And, oh, Eva, please don't think me an ungrateful guest when I say that I just must be there to meet them. I've never been away from my Mumsie before, not even for one night, and now we haven't seen each other for nearly three long months."

Eva slipped her arm around her friend's waist, and in her heart was such a wistful yearning. She did not say it, but she was thinking that it was three long years since her darling mother had died, and she would go anywhere, suffer anything, if only she could meet her again. But she blinked back the tears that would come, and, smiling bravely, she said, "I understand, Della. I would want to do the same thing if I were you."

Then such a hustle and bustle as there was during the next two days, for it had been decided that Adele and Jack were to travel back home with the others in the private car. Doris Drexel had had a wire from her father, who was in Bisbee, saying that three of the



men in the party had decided to go to the Colorado Mountains on a bear-hunt, and, in consequence, there would be three berths vacant.

"But Jackie and I will only need two of them," Adele exclaimed. "Who else wants to go East?"

Then, to her surprise, Donald Dare stepped forward, and, in his courteous way, said, "Miss Doris, would your father be willing to permit me to occupy the third berth?"

"Oh, Donald," Doris declared, "of course he would; but I didn't know that you were returning East so soon."

Mr. Dearman placed a kindly hand on Donald's shoulder as he said, "My boy, I know that you are anxious to see your mother, and if you care to go now, I will promise you that your ranch and cattle will be looked after to the best of our ability. Isn't that so, Rusty Pete?"

"It is, indeed, sir," the cowboy replied earnestly. "I'll look after it for you, Donald, as if it were my own."



The boy thanked the two men, and half an hour later, when Adele was standing alone at the pasture fence, saying good-by to the wiry pony she had ridden all summer, she heard a step approaching, and she smiled a welcome as Donald Dare stood beside her.

"Are you glad that I am going with you, Adele?" the boy asked.

"Oh, indeed, I am!" the girl replied frankly. "And how happy your little mother will be to see you!"

Then, turning, they walked back, stopping a moment to look over the shimmering sand toward the Bald Mountains, where lay Donald's ranch. "I want to go East for a time," the boy said earnestly. "But, oh, I do so love this free desert life. I know I shall soon want to come back."

Adele smiled understandingly, and then together they walked on toward the ranch house.

The next morning early the station master's son appeared with a lumbering vehicle,



and, with the help of the boys, the trunks and bags were stacked thereon and it rumbled away again over the mesa.

Then, later, when all were ready to go to the station, the hayrack appeared, and, after having said good-by to Señora Gabriella, Bonita, and Miguel, the throng of girls climbed in and sat upon the straw. Rusty Pete drove, and he invited Mandy to sit at his side. Mr. Dearman and the boys rode on horseback, and, just to enliven the scene, Rattlesnake Jack, Stampede Bob, and Donald Dare now and then fired shots into the air.

The long drive to Douglas took several hours, and there they found the private car on a siding, and Mr. Drexel watching for them. He was indeed glad to meet Mr. Dearman, but, before they had long to visit, the train which was to bear them eastward arrived, their car was attached, and the young people, after having given those who were to remain behind hugs or hand-shakes, trooped aboard and then waved from the



open windows, while the puffing engine drew them slowly out of sight.

That night, while the others were making merry within, Adele sat alone on the observation platform, looking at the stars that seemed like jewels in the wide, dark sky, and then at the silent desert about her.

Something in her nature responded to the vastness and the peace of it. She heard her name called within, and, rising, she stretched out her arms as she said, "Good-by, wonderful desert! Some day I am coming back."

If you care to hear more of these young people, read "Adele Doring at Boarding-School."

THE END























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